

The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

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Jacob: Hello everyone. Welcome to another episode of The Future of Work podcast. My guest today is Arun Chidambaram, the Global Head of Talent Analytics at Pfizer. Arun, thanks for joining me.

Arun: Great, thanks Jacob. Thanks really, I'm happy to be on your program.

Jacob: And so the notion of talent in the workplace and people analytics, just data in general, is a very popular one. But before we get into talking about [00:00:30] all that fun stuff, let's start with a little bit of information about you. How did you get into the space that you're in now? What background do you want to share with the listeners?

Arun: Sure. It's very interesting in how I landed up in this space. My background is in engineering and for the first half of my career I was making motorcycles for Harley Davidson, that's what I did.

Jacob: That sounds pretty fun.

Arun: Yeah, it is, it's still in me. [00:01:00] My wife and I both work at Harley and we both loved the product, the culture, everything about it. The last part of my Harley was probably in 2004 through 2006. I was in Boston and I had a chance to attend a program by Tom Davenport. And he was doing this knowledge management of moving tasks to explicit knowledge. And interestingly I saw read [00:01:30] the War for Talent Case for [Mackensie 00:01:32]. So that was kind of my fuzzy recollection. Whereas it sounded very interesting I was by no means Nostradamus, I did not know this field would become this famous. I've been through that journey interestingly since it didn't even have a name in 2004. And then I worked through different companies, met a lot of good people in this space. Worked at Merck, at ESPN, and now at Pfizer. [00:02:00] And interestingly being an analytical and with math background, the evolution of this field has been phenomenal.

Back in the days it was primarily I would say, someone from compensation and HRIS, but if you look at the diversity of this teams spread, you have everything from behavioral economics to astrophysicists to math, HR. So that's kind of what [00:02:30] I really like about this function on the hope it has, and the kind of distribution of different thoughts it brings to the table. And I look at the future, which is very interesting and you spend a lot of time on that, this field becomes more critical to the success of an organization.

Jacob: Actually I'm glad you mentioned Tom, because he was a podcast guest as well, so small world.

Arun: Yeah. Tom is a great, great friend and also a coach, advisor [00:03:00] to the entire community as well.

Jacob: Yeah, I think actually quite a few people that we both know, David Green was a podcast guest. And some of your other co-workers, well not co-workers, your peers in the people analytic space have been guests. A very hot topic, something a lot of people want to know about. And so, what does a typical day look like for you?

Arun: For us it's ... maturity is a very important word, so just to answer your question, a typical day would be we work on ... I'm very blessed [00:03:30] to be surrounded by some extremely smart HR partners, business partners on the business as a whole. At least the work we do, and many companies are in that space now, which is kind of nice to be in this field. So a typical day would be like we ... depending on the project's life cycle, we typically have five stages to the project life cycle. We start off our work with the research proposal. And the research proposal [00:04:00] will mean basically a discussion, which is very important to our field. It could be with HR, any part of the HR organization, or the business organization, depending on where the work comes from. There could be a day like today would be some discussion of the early stage, that's exactly what I did earlier in the day. We worked with our HR and our account acquisition teams to just figure out, brainstorming a problem statement.

Part of the day could [00:04:30] also be if the project is on the data side of it, the five steps being; we have a research method, we come up with a conceptual model, we go on a data exploration, then we analyze it, then the story telling. So today the next part would be more around the analysis part, we're working on an interesting project with our business analytics team. And then it's also some exploration of new ideas. So there's no one set or ... [00:05:00] because these five phases, or stages, can fit in in a typical day. But the key factor is ... I've kind of been debating, I had a good discussion this week in Phoenix with some really great HR leaders, is this whole debate about should we educate HR. It's not an us and them. For me in my journey with Pfizer, I'm very lucky to be surrounded by some really smart people. We actually had a discussion and [00:05:30] there is some examples where you can be cocooned inside your data science thinking, but the qualitative side of the mix, you need to listen to your HR folks.

And it doesn't need to be just HR, whether it's marketing analytics, or financial modeling, or your business analytics. You have to listen to your consumer and I think that listening thing is very critical to be successful as well. So it's great, my day goes [00:06:00] pretty good, working with very challenging projects. And also a lot of learning.

Jacob: Sounds like a fun day, indeed. Now some people listening to this podcast are probably familiar with people analytics and Talent Analytics, but I'd say most people are not. Because while we do get a pretty good amount of people in HR that listen to this, there are a lot of people that are in just general management, maybe even entry-level employees that are maybe kind of [00:06:30] aware of what this means, but not really.

How would you explain Talent Analytics or people analytics? What it is, what it means, what it can do to maybe somebody that is not that familiar with the concept?

Arun:

Sure, that's a great question. The key question is this, the perception of what analytics is has such a diverse thought. You heard if I use another metaphor here, [00:07:00] in the same room if I'm showing a movie you will have someone who loves a Jackie Chan style movie and then someone who would love A Clockwork Orange, so Stanley Kubrick's movie. The point I'm trying to make is, there are some places where reporting is done and you come up with a cool graph and it gives some value to them, that's all they need. But on the other extreme you would see [00:07:30] all kinds of a network analysis, the future of work and AI, and everything within AI. So, it's important to know whether you're doing reporting to that basic graph, or you're going to that other end. The key piece is you will have to provide value. It has to create value. You could be doing some really, really advanced analytics, but if you're not able to experiment it, create value out of it, it's of no use.

The [00:08:00] reason I said that is a lot of people come, for example I was in Wharton last week, it's a fantastic [inaudible 00:08:07]. If you don't be very careful to hear the speakers from Wharton, you can't just come into a community and start applying them immediately because it will not work. So there is a lot of opportunities in a very wider spread horizon. Because it's not that ... don't get disappointed if someone is doing for example network analysis and you're not [00:08:30] able to do it. The focus should be on creating value. And the different pieces of what [inaudible 00:08:35] data analytics, right? So there is a reporting component to it, which people have called descriptive statistics.

And more and more companies are kind of ... are getting ... it's called more democratization of data. The end user wants what they want. The analytical community has in general come out of there. There's some companies [00:09:00] which still do that, and I'm not saying that's bad. But there's one flavor. Those that are interested in that space, there is an appetite for that. That would be I would say on the lower end of the analytical extremes. And then there is comes a middle piece where most companies have started to build this function. And they might have a very small team focusing on basic HR problems. But what that means in you would be solving data sets and you would start applying some [00:09:30] basic level of mathematical rigor. And then comes like a next part, which is on the journey piece extreme. When you are focusing on things like networks and production models and the real data science work kicks in.

So if you are a data scientist and you are going into a community which is only doing the basic level, that is what I call the talent misfit or [inaudible 00:09:58] David and I wrote a paper. [00:10:00] It's about hiring right, not just hiring bright that matters. So obviously it's a no-brainer, and what happens is they don't get ... they don't fit in the community. And it's not that the HR or the leadership is thinking or not investing, it's because it's not the right time. So the spread is very high, it's based on what your talent skill sets are. I would tell whoever is trying to get into, explore the culture. Figure out [00:10:30] what they exactly need. Even when someone says hey, I need a data scientist, ask the right questions back to the hiring manager. How are you going to use data science?

And then on the same token if you are trying to read ... like I've seen a lot of people go into boot camps, data boot camps, and trying to learn. It's not like ... talent data is a very special field. It's not that just because I know how to crunch numbers I will be a fit, because we [00:11:00] deal with lot of confidential data. We work with our employment law, by the way which I am very blessed to have a fantastic employment law team advisor, who guide us, who coach us, sponsor us, and support us. Then at the same time that's where data science kind of takes a back step. Because there is certain things which you have to understand, that mathematically may sound right, but ethically it may not sound right. So you will have to take the [00:11:30] choice of not doing that work. Which has nothing to do with analytics.

So there is also that maturity which brings you, which you learn through good leaders within a system. And then there is data privacy pieces, which is very big for us, for every company I've known. Then there are things like GDPR, and what does that really mean. How do you help your organization think through? So it's not just the field is very diverse within itself. And you can do anything from recruiting [00:12:00] analytics all the way through retirement. So it's not just ... my whole point here is to people who are listening is, be careful in your selection of vary on the work. At the same time don't make everything numbers driven and try to understand this function which has been in existence ... And in fact this is interesting, Jacob, in the meeting some of data leaders, people started saying hey, you need to teach HR people analytics if they don't [00:12:30] understand, and I said wait a minute, if you're talking these large corporations if HR did not exist, and I just made a hypothetical case to them to think about it. If your function didn't exist for two days, the company will come down. So there is the importance of it, and my point to even people who are very analytical is to understand what value HR brings to the table and the cohesiveness ... the cohesive thinking will be more helpful.

Jacob: Makes sense to me. [00:13:00] I think there's a lot that goes into the talent analytic space. Some people describe it as kind of like using data inside of your company to make decisions, but as you articulated it's not quite so simple because there are a lot of different aspects that fit into the talent analytic space. Maybe would you be able to ... is it fair to categorize it or maybe summarize it as basically using data inside of your organization as a way to make [00:13:30] better decisions about people?

Arun: It's not about people to be very honest, it's again to me ... HR is not the final end product. It's about the business value. What business problem are you solving?

Jacob: Better decisions about business?

Arun: Yeah absolutely because I'll give examples, you've heard that right? If it is about manage and effectiveness, I'm just making this an example about what other companies [00:14:00] are doing and all of us do. If you're trying to improve manager effectiveness, which tries to get more motivation, which engages our talent, this into a better product, right? I'm going to customer service. Eventually it all ends up in that. It's not about ... if the goal is to go chase the outcome is about people ... I feel, this is my take on it. But it never is because when the question comes to us, we leverage data insights. There are a lot insights [00:14:30] within HR, which we plug in. It's not only when you said internal

data sets, we also use leverage, external leverage. You have sociopolitical factors, you have external market trends, you have external sales data, there's revenue. So it's a good combination about internal/external to chase a business problem, in my opinion.

Jacob: If you look at ... earlier in the podcast you mentioned [00:15:00] I think five stages that you guys go through. I'm really interested in, if you're allowed to do this, are you able to walk us through, maybe in Pfizer, any examples or stories? Or how you would go through those five stages? Either through something existing that you've done, or if you had to make one up. How would you walk us through?

Arun: Yeah, without going into the details of the work, but I can definitely talk about the ... and again, these are not real data sets and stuff, [00:15:30] but you get the flavor of it, right? A good example would be like a business partner would say that, hey, working with business leaders that we have some kind of ... are we doing, there's a process inefficiency exercise. We feel that there are these three groups, where can we do things in a better way? Are we productive enough? So [00:16:00] it kind of surfaces from the business point of view, there is a decision that happens within the business and HR colleagues supporting that part of the business. What happens at that point is if it is just a fact that, hey, I need to know what a trend was. Then the business partner has access and we don't do a great job of helping HR folks with the right data set at the right time, but they get that data set.

But if the discussion becomes that hey, wait a minute, [00:16:30] I don't know what the, for example, trends are, I don't know what process efficiency means. How do I measure it? How do these three groups work? Who should be in school? They kind of surface that with us in a discussion. At this point they're not asking for, hey go get me the data, I made a point, let me go solve it. This is what I was trying to mention with HR, it comes to us that way. And then we discuss and then we have a ... Because they know [00:17:00] we exist and they know what we do, the next step would obviously be my team kicks in. And then they say hey, we talked together, and in this particular example they'll say that, Arun, there is a survey based, they're working a lot on science-based [inaudible 00:17:16] network analysis. We work a lot closely with [inaudible 00:17:20] and the Connector Commons. And we would say that we would be able ... we will question them, we will hypothesize [00:17:30] it.

We will, in this case, spend more time with the business partners and the business leaders. And they would say ... Then we will say [inaudible 00:17:41] is this data available? What is that outcome you are trying to do? Are you willing to test it out ... because another area within analytics, particularly in HR, I'm not talking about Pfizer, but in general is we spend a lot of time on the pre-analysis and the post analysis [00:18:00] we don't spend time. So we have lately started pushing [00:18:03] how you measure the success, the outcome of the whole analysis. So that's all in that first step. So you have the cases [inaudible 00:18:11] groups, there are some handoffs, the handoffs happening in the right time and the right place.

The next step would be then, once it's in agreement we can then come back and schedule [inaudible 00:18:26] proposal, just to make sure all parties are right. That will also include a timeline. [00:18:30] It's kind of a mini project timeline. And then we start

digging into the data side of the mix. So we go under data, we ... in this case it'll be a survey, because we're doing survey [inaudible 00:18:41], so we will look at the population, the scope, there's a communication piece to it. So this is kind of where I'm telling that the leader or the team just does not only do data signs, right? So typically you don't have a project manager supporting you. You don't have a special person just running reports [00:19:00] for you. So the Talent Analytics team does pretty much everything, and this is where you'll have to absolutely prioritize the work, which actually I'll come back later in this discussion.

So we do that, we scope it out, we get approval, we change the data sets. This is the stage where what I call go into hibernation mode and we get the data sets, we run the analysis pieces. One interesting piece we've done, which I think has been successful, is when we do the analysis [00:19:30] piece we do keep our HR folks in this case, in this example [inaudible 00:19:33] HR partners. In the mix so that it's not gonna be just give them the final power point or the story or whatever. We, literally after the first initial results kick out on the networks we then say hey, we're seeing these trends, is it making sense, and then the business partner in this case has said that wait a minute, that is interesting, you're saying.

So they kind of start analyzing with us. So [00:20:00] the good news here is they not only learn this tool, but they also are giving some extremely good feedback, and then we kind of read on the model, we kind of say is this making sense, and the decision, the sort of story telling piece already is happening in the analytical piece, and that is being done by the business partner in this example. It could be a business leader, depending on who you are final consumer is, or [inaudible 00:20:20] the consumer is.

So once we do work, this is where I've seen that then the next step obviously is to build all this into a story, [00:20:30] and it probably goes to a few alterations. We have some, in this particular example I think they were spot on, we got the right sponsorship, but in my past [inaudible 00:20:41] only at five other companies, there is some efficiency exercise in like how quickly can these steps happen. So there is definitely some opportunity to clean it up and make it faster.

But once the power point is done, [inaudible 00:20:55] we still use power point, so there [00:21:00] are lessons learned. For example you don't show things like an entire network graph, well it'll look cool and sexy, but you're not gonna show that. You know who the audience is. The business partner will say that this leader has particularly these type of situations do not say, or this type of situation you should say. So we kind of get those signals as we are building the story, as we are showing the results. On the same note I will caution you not to be a [00:21:30] lot of [inaudible 00:21:32] python as one of her latest [inaudible 00:21:34] experience in python. But the point is we will never ever show the details of the [inaudible 00:21:40] to your HR business partner, or say hey look how cool it is. That's something you're gonna leave the team [inaudible 00:21:47], unless the HR business partners absolutely wants to learn all this tech name, then you just send them the-

Jacob: You never know, they might wanna know.

Arun: That's what I'm saying, send them the [inaudible 00:21:58]. I mean that's possible. It's possible.

Jacob: Yeah.

Arun: But in [00:22:00] this exercise, I mean obviously you don't want to because one, it's none-value aired. Two, you might scare them. Three, you don't need to do any of those. It doesn't create value, right?

Jacob: Yeah, yeah. So-

Arun: So that's kind of what a typical flow is, and then we come to result, then the standard how you present to the audience [crosstalk 00:22:19] leadership it's different matter. So that's kind of what a typical flow is.

Jacob: So let's say for example I was at [00:22:30] Pfizer and I wanted to do something around, I don't know, let's say leadership for example, and I wanted to figure out who are the most effective leaders inside of Pfizer, what skills do they have that make them more successful, and you know then I wanna teach everybody else that. So it sounds like what I would do first is I would come to you and I would say, hey Arun, I'm trying to figure out, first of all, who are the most successful teams, or the leaders, and what skills do they have or qualities do they have that others don't? And so what would you do with that information now that I told you that?

Arun: Yeah, [00:23:00] so this is again, it's a hypothetical case, because if it was we do have a whole my peer is the head of learning and development and talent, and they have some really great leadership programs already taking place, and we do have a measurement techniques and we also share, there are many things, leadership at all levels. We're going with that whole head heart and guts behavior. So there's a lot going in that space, but in this hypothetical case they would [00:23:30] come and it depends, right. You know for example what is leadership, so we are working on something on that also with my chief running officer.

So, it would matter what value. I mean we'll say that are you looking for ... It's very broad, if you just say all of Pfizer leadership, let's do something. It's very hard, we try to solve the problems. I mean if the question is around, hey, we want [00:24:00] certain leadership skills sets in certain areas and can you test it out of it's there or not. Leaders like being more inclusive or not. Is there any manager effectiveness related.

So what I'm trying to say is, my question will be more around what are you trying to solve, rather than just saying these leadership. It's very broad statement to make.

Jacob: Well let's say productivity. I wanna create teams that are more productive and efficient and engaged, so performance ultimately, [00:24:30] it comes down to I wanna drive better performance.

Arun: Yeah, so I would give an example, I mean not with the Pfizer lense, but in what I have seen research was [inaudible 00:24:38] fairly well connected in this industry to. It would be prototyping something that productivity, like I've seen Microsoft comment that all 365 workplace analytics products, which actually is looking at meeting minutes and an aggregate level [inaudible 00:24:58] [00:25:00] all our teams are looking at meetings, and are we spending the right amount of time, are we spending more or less. Actually many companies do that.

And this is actually great way to tackle productivity. So the question productivity becomes use of time has been a very, what I call a low hanging fruit, and it's not debatable. Then there are networks we have done where we've seen that productivity is actually a result [00:25:30] of process and efficiency, so if there are more process efficient than you are productive. In some examples you'll [inaudible 00:25:37] identifying through networks, like you know how do we increase speed of decision making through our network channels. So that's another way of looking at it.

So there are examples, again in terms of how we're chasing productivity, but we don't have an economic calculator and say that this is how product we should mean. So it's [00:26:00] a very, particularly when it comes inside the HR ecosystem, it becomes hard when you don't have that very strong [inaudible 00:26:07] variable. So we kind of piece it down in terms of, like in this meeting and its example, you know our teams [inaudible 00:26:15] often. Are you having what is called a fragmentation, which is like how much focus time do you really have before you do work. There are stats about like through Microsoft's research [00:26:30] that if a manager sends one email that results in your direct support sending 2.2 x times, if you send emails later in the night, which can be [inaudible 00:26:42], if it can wait till morning that creates unnecessary load.

So those are all the kind of researchers have seen, which tackles a issue of productivity.

Jacob: Okay, and then basically you take that internally, use the data that you have, and try to basically come back with some sort of an answer for [00:27:00] me.

Arun: That's true.

Jacob: Okay. So, curious, how big is your team at Pfizer that runs Talent Analytics, and also is it an independent team inside of the company, or do you guys report to HR?

Arun: Yeah, that's a fantastic question. Something very near and dear to me, and I in fact talked about it even yesterday. So, it might be a slightly long answer, so bear with me on this one. And the history is very important here. Historically in the last [00:27:30] probably 10 years the style of building this function was, you would have ... it's been in HR for the most part, like I would say 90% of the corporations I have known and Fortune 500 [inaudible 00:27:45] HR, right, today. It starts off with you'll have an average of two to three people in your team. Three people I would say. And each person will support a group of divisions, like one person [00:28:00] will say I will take the enabling functions, the other person in your team would say they'll take manufacturing, and the third one will do whatever, like say he'll send [inaudible 00:28:10].

And then they kind of go in partner with the business partners, with the HR teams, and then they come back with projects. And what has happened has that once people start to know who you are, your demand increases, and then there's a tsunami of demand. And [00:28:30] the growth in this function has been very carefully done, so then the next thing happens, is then you say I'm not able to cope with the demand and either I increase my skill and resources or I try to shift it, you know. And then he'll say that I'll work on some key themes, broad, like without knowing the HR workforce planning is huge. But employee experience these days are big, so people have done that. Let's just pick whatever is the biggest thing and let's try to solve that.

The third piece is, as [00:29:00] I'm plotting this in the last 10 years the maturity of this organization has also increased, right? So the third piece which I've seen some of my friends do in other companies is that because it's so unique, like they have these [inaudible 00:29:14] of specialization, so they have like a data engineering specialization, they have a data research, they have visualization expert, and they do the [inaudible 00:29:23] which is they're only in their space. [inaudible 00:29:25] experts, and then you have these front facing [00:29:30] business clients, who may not be the python of the [inaudible 00:29:34], but they are kind of the project manager, they are the front face, they are with the business partners. And this way you are able to hone in, get much time, be more clear. And one thing that the data signs community is like you know, in a Talent Analytics field [inaudible 00:29:52] do not get the time. You need to spend a lot of time with data if you really wanna be good at it, right? It's not like hey I touched a button [00:30:00] and everything will pop up.

So, more in some organizations like those three or four people are doing everything. So that model will not survive if you are growing in demand, you are growing more mature. So that's kind of what evolution is. And I'll tell the Pfizer story, it's very impressive, because we ... And actually there's one more point, I'm sorry. The other point is what is analytics, right?

So when I started we had reporting under my function, [00:30:30] and at that time our team was about nine people, and then there was a transformation that happened, and this is where we [inaudible 00:30:37] the HR leadership is. Like they really think through it. So a decision was made, so it's not that hey Google does this way, or Facebook does this way, or you know someone else is doing this one, I'm also going to do that. You gotta look at your own internal system, internal organizations decide what is best, and this is [00:31:00] what my HR [inaudible 00:31:01] team did, which was the right thing to do. When the transformation happened they kind of, we parsed into a separate COE. So we said that this function is different, the value creation is different, and they gave me a choice and said Arun, what do you think? You know, should it be reporting under you? And I needed assistant to get reporting in our HR operations function, and us focusing purely on the analytical work.

So the reason I say well how many [00:31:30] people, so if you look at benchmarks they're very picky one, because some companies have surveys and employment engagement surveys, assessments, diversity reporting, plus they have the data sign. Some companies have just the survey and the data sign. Some companies only have data signs. So we chose the route to just focus on the analytical portion of it and we

partner very well with our reporting community. We depend on them for a lot of things. There's still opportunity in that space. So, the question very picky of [00:32:00] how many people people should have, when it all depends on their [inaudible 00:32:04] maturity, and how you build it. And to answer your question, yeah we are [inaudible 00:32:10] chief [inaudible 00:32:10] officer Pamela [Pareer 00:32:12]. And it's been a good, good ride.

So, in my case, now everybody [inaudible 00:32:20] here, like I have [inaudible 00:32:22] asked recent as probably a month in my head, the debate I have now is quality over [00:32:30] quantity, right? And in fact I met some good friends at Ford Motor company and at Lincoln Financial at the recent conference, and some of them are starting and saying what should we do? The advice I gave Jacob is like you know pick, this is this talent group you have and [inaudible 00:32:53] total respect to every Talent Analytics company in the world and Talent Analytics professionals in the world. This is, if I give this metaphor, we [00:33:00] are the seeds in this organizational farm. Think about it. We absolutely have to nurture this, shield them, cover them, because this is, this is one of your most awesome thing in your entire organization and there are three or four people. My only advice is to like make sure that you have to prioritize and make sure they are working in the right things.

So this is where my quality or quantity debate has began, and the key, the message I give back [00:33:30] was, you cannot solve every problem, you cannot [inaudible 00:33:33] you cannot teach every business partner, you cannot ... But what if you focus on value, you focus on absolute, what are the three most important things for the company, and you leverage this great skill set, assuming if you had a Talent Analytics group, and that they're doing something in signs, is to shift this quality or quantity debate, and make sure that ... it's like the art of polite refusal, [00:34:00] you can just say no. If you don't wanna say no just say no, you know, and that has to have some sponsorship, some kind of leadership support, and I'm very blessed to have that [inaudible 00:34:08] discussions, you know, and I do quality work and my team does quality work.

So there is this debate about quality or quantity and that's what I stated with some of the peers in other groups, and said that run an experiment. Run an experiment that you will have these three or four people and how many ever you have. I'm mentioning people, x number of people, and [00:34:30] pick a project, try for three months, six months, and see if it works or not. If it doesn't work change it. My point is not to do what everyone has done in the last 10 years and do the same models. If you're starting on a clean sheet of paper I would actually greatly suggest to run an experiment [inaudible 00:34:47] based on a number of people, solve a problem, and then scale it accordingly. And I mean obviously learn some lessons from that.

So let me pause that, I said I did warn you it be a long answer. Just wanted [00:35:00] to see if it made sense.

Jacob: Yeah, I mean I think so. For me it makes sense because, well I've spoken to a lot of people in the Talent Analytics and people space, but I've heard a little bit of a ... So some people believe that talent and people analytics should be under HR and then I've also

talked to some people who believe that people in Talent Analytics should be its own department, that every other department could [00:35:30] then tap into. So I think I've seen sort of two opinions and perspectives on that, and I guess I'm interested in which one you think is likely to happen in the future.

Arun: Sure, sure.

Jacob: Stand alone, or will it continue to be under HR?

Arun: This again, it feels like it's like a groundhog day for me. I was in the same kind of questions were coming yesterday, too, so that's great. So here is the deal, if you're early in your journey it doesn't make sense to, you know, you have to test something [00:36:00] out, so meaning you have to prove what this function is. Because if someone jumps Talent Analytics without doing it straight into business analytics, that may not be a good idea. And I'll tell you why. Remember the kind of lessons you've learned in terms of how HR functions, you have to have some HR background, [inaudible 00:36:23] actually you have to have exposure to how decisions are made. So there is confidential data sets. [00:36:30] A lot of people don't know to ... I mean particularly business analytic folks, which I have met, they don't, because they're not exposed to it, right?

So if someone is not done this work and goes directly into a chief analytic [inaudible 00:36:43] I think that may not be a good idea. On the flip side, if you're not getting the right support from HR, for all good reasons, I mean it's not because they don't like it's because they cannot afford. And [inaudible 00:36:54] if you ask my predictions this function will eventually go into [00:37:00] chief analytics of it, it has to. And it's not just this function, there are analytical buckets like there are different cohorts, even within Pfizer from all the, some of these cohorts, right? We have our IT function which does some excellent analytics function. We have in our research and development they have all kinds of analytics going on there, they have financial, I'm sure someone in finance is doing this, marketing analytics.

My goal is that this should fall under the chief analytics office [00:37:30] when you said the word future, right? Because the reason I say that is it's not only from a career planning point of view, from a technology investment point of view, from a resource support point of view, from a think tank, togetherness, there's all advantages things in that space, but I will not say this because HR makes a little tricky because of this one aspect of how you [inaudible 00:37:56] data sets, and to be very honest making motorcycles is [00:38:00] much more easier than doing this work, Jacob. Because it's not as easy as people think, because working with human beings, right. The variants, the kind of you know, it's not everything is not [inaudible 00:38:11] driven, so it becomes a little tricky. So my point would be it will eventually go for sure, and in my opinion, this again, I'm not giving you a Pfizer opinion here but just Arun opinion that the CEO in my opinion is going to mandate the CHROs and the CIOs, [00:38:30] to be an absolutely data driven, you know culture.

Now, for the CHRO, so now thinking in that direction, I mean it'll be a challenge, because it'll eventually go probably into CIO, but my thinking is at the CAO, which many companies have started creating those functions, I mean even if they don't have that

title, they do have business analytics which probably does most of your, it's the biggest piece of the whole pie. But again, the point is don't do [00:39:00] immediately. And how you do it is a question that came yesterday, right? So, for now an example be this time like we are partnering with our business analytics teams. Our business analytics leader is seeing how complicated this role is, and you know when you talk about talking with privacy, how you use data sets, how you use data sets instead of markets, so for me an ideal situation would be what I'm [00:39:30] trying to do, which is work on projects, let them see, and then when the time is right, move, rather than just moving for the heck of it.

Jacob: Yeah, I think that makes sense, right. Do something because it makes business sense as opposed to doing it just for the sake of doing it.

Arun: Correct.

Jacob: Where do you think we are in the Talent Analytics world now? So if you were to think of, and earlier you mentioned groundhog day, you mentioned I think that for a lot of companies it's still early. So [00:40:00] if you were to just take kind of a step back and just look at where we are in the world of Talent Analytics, how would you assess where we are globally?

Arun: I think the exponential growth of this function in all analytical space has been the most. It's such a very powerful statement I'm making, but you know if you really look what we did last year to what we're doing this year, it's a phenomenal growth. So I am very happy and I wanna thank everyone who's doing this work in other companies, [00:40:30] too. If you look at the quality of conferences right now. I mean we have like [inaudible 00:40:36] come and speak at the [inaudible 00:40:38] thanks to Professor Adam Grant. But you know the quality of the work, the kind of discussions that are happening, it was and they had like [inaudible 00:40:50] we had Mary Barra from GM, well the CEO of GM. So, and then the discussions I'm having. So the leaders are talking and the exponential growth of, you know if you're talking [00:41:00] from networks, you're talking like there are a lot of great companies, and I mean also look at the technology lense, right, in terms of technology in HR, every technology is selling analytics, right? So I don't know of any technology today that does not sell analytics, right.

So when you think of all the changes, name any other function which has this kind of growth in probably a 12 to 18 month period. I can't think anything else unless you know something.

Jacob: No.

Arun: Yeah, think about it.

Jacob: Yeah, [00:41:30] I mean I always say that HR and IT are the two areas that are kind of the coolest places to work in, and people analytics and data science I think is seeing just really amazing growth as far as jobs goes.

Arun: True.

Jacob: So I think there's gonna be a lot of really cool stuff that's happening in that space. Well I guess this transl Transitions. Ah, man. [00:42:00] I was gonna say translates. Transitions well into my next question, which is gonna be around the depth of Talent Analytics, because sometimes I talk to companies and I say oh, are you guys doing anything around people or Talent Analytics and they'll say oh yeah, we do our engagement survey and then our Talent Analytics team looks at those engagement surveys, and then I'm wondering is that really what Talent Analytics is? Are you just looking at engagement surveys and just making sense of it? But [00:42:30] from our conversations that we've had in the past, obviously it's much more than just looking at an annual or even a quarterly engagement survey. So, maybe you can kind of address that and also explore, what are some of the other pieces of data and information that you look at in this space, and kind of moving beyond just looking at engagement surveys.

Arun: Sure, sure. This is a very, actually a very, the fact that it is [00:43:00] so many companies, right, so it's obviously it's like people are getting nowhere. The way I could look at it, like I say the rate of change is more important in this space, and I think five years ago if you'd said this question, that people are just looking at engagement and they do Talent Analytics I would probably would have agreed with. [inaudible 00:43:20] I'm very crazy about this function, you know that. But, if you say that now, I mean [00:43:30] look around, people [inaudible 00:43:32] and how you do engagement surveys is a completely different debate, I'm not gonna go into that, but how you use the data set, it's like a completely different.

Engagement is one independent variable. I mean the [inaudible 00:43:47] survey to inputs like the items or dimensions or who you're doing it. People have started using all forms of HR data, [inaudible 00:43:55] I mean I've seen people [inaudible 00:43:58] external data sets, like [inaudible 00:44:00] [00:44:00] for example when [inaudible 00:44:03] we were looking at commute times. We have social-political factors, educational trends, migration patterns, land raids. These are all variables we put in our process, many people, not just us. We look at the partner with the sales teams, we look at that space. So, I'll give [inaudible 00:44:26] I think, they a really nice graph [00:44:30] actually, and that actually sums up your question, right?

And the x axis was complexity and y axis was insight, so it's a very standard x-y plot, and this all on data. So the first one they said that something which is not going to give you a lot and less complex, is they call the zone of commons. This is where you use HR data sets, engagement data sets, [00:45:00] then something [inaudible 00:45:03] you can use it any time. Then comes in that [inaudible 00:45:08] it's kind of a negative slope [inaudible 00:45:11]. Then comes what this is complexity is kind of more, which is they call the zone of debate. Many companies are in that zone of debate now. Many companies, including us. Which as we started thinking, and this is like the meta of analysis, like it terms of [00:45:30] you know if you look at meeting minutes, do you look, can we look at the companies and the [inaudible 00:45:37] space, which like look at [inaudible 00:45:39], just the email not like content, from any [inaudible 00:45:43]

just behind the scenes graphs of [inaudible 00:45:47] kind of a deal, right. I mean there are companies which are looking at it, which kind of falls into the zone of debate.

And then there is also products like form Microsoft which is looking at, again meta level. And when I say meta level, I wanna be very clear, it [00:46:00] does not looking into form of body of text, and it is also not identifying any of the individuals. It's completely de-identified. So that's kind of debate about how do we create more value, and in fact I was in one place when I think one of the companies is uses sleeping patterns and like variables like lot of work being done, and good friend of mine Ben [inaudible 00:46:27] was a CEO of Humanize [00:46:29] has a great product-

Jacob: [00:46:30] Also a podcast guest, by the way.

Arun: Oh, perfect, so it's really a small world ... And Ben's product and there are many in that space, you know, which is that zone of debate which is, that's why you need to understand how mature your organization is, how connected you are, what it means. And then the third piece would [inaudible 00:46:51] I really like this graph, is that zone of reticence. That is where you have started hearing, right? I mean I don't know any of my peer companies [00:47:00] is doing that. At least I'm talking about Apple and Googles of the world, the fact I know ... There are, I'm sure you've heard it, there's like chips inside the bodies and you know, somewhere in China they're already thinking about all this, because facial recognition is big in China, right. Everything is based on facial recognition. So, it isn't that [inaudible 00:47:20] you're monitoring sleep patterns, and you're trying monitoring sleep patterns, and getting inside the email body and analyzing and blah blah blah. That's called the zone of reticence.

Very very ... [00:47:30] I don't know, to be honest I don't know who does that, but that is where the future is heading, and not understanding that will be probably five years from now might be a competitor, could be a competitor of [inaudible 00:47:42] I'm not saying you should do that, but understanding what it is, how much can we go, how transparent should we be, that's all the debate, I mean the external communities happening. So that's kind of what I would put in that most of us have mastered that zone of commons, and again thanks to [inaudible 00:48:00] this [00:48:00] is purely from there, it's their graph. Then the zone of debaters where we are, and not a cross splice or two, because it's a little convoluted, I know what the business analytics team does in analytics, but [inaudible 00:48:14] started thinking at a very high level, not doing in many projects, and I know many companies are in that state, and the zone of reticence is very, I would say few companies who I don't know.

Jacob: Makes sense. I gotta find that graph now, and take a [00:48:30] look at it.

Arun: Yeah, it's very interesting. And then you can put many factors in that and I think it's like, it becomes, I mean again not like the Pfizer lense, but just with the analytical head, as this future comes to us, how do we master those two spaces and be very clear about it and be very open about it? That will be a good discussion if you can have a talk later, come in and speak in that space.

Jacob: So, I guess it sounds like then from your perspective there's still, [00:49:00] we're still kind of early then in the Talent Analytics space. There's still a lot of growth, a lot of room left for what we could start doing.

Arun: Yes, absolutely, absolutely.

Jacob: Okay. Have you also thought about the role that maybe AI might play in this? You know we've been hearing about some companies, like Microsoft experimenting with using voice assistance, to make sense of data. So where is AI gonna fit in all this, and have you thought about that?

Arun: Yeah, I mean we can't do applied [inaudible 00:49:30] [00:49:30] I'm very connected because I have a three year old daughter, so she is, everything is my entire motivation for AI is her, because I absolutely wanna make sure which vault she's going inside, so I spend a lot of time in this space, particularly looking at China. China's a country which really I spend a lot of time reading about them. But in terms in the HR space the two areas where I've seen is, recruiting is [00:50:00] one which is come in, and I think, I don't recall which professor it was, but someone did say that if the job is repetitive and then good luck. If it's the same repetitive there's a good shot at an AI application, but the way I've seen it is in [inaudible 00:50:21] and then I also heard about the robotic process automation. Some companies have done some good case studies on that, [00:50:30] which is coming more from the payroll side.

So in terms of [inaudible 00:50:36] which I've seen, I think we are very, very early in HR. And we need to understand the [inaudible 00:50:44] and what it means. So I would say it's extremely early, but if you ask me a question I would say there is any space [inaudible 00:50:54] experimenting with the [inaudible 00:50:57]

Jacob: What about the role of leadership in people analytics and [00:51:00] Talent Analytics? It seems like you probably need to have the right leaders on board who kind of embrace and understand this.

Arun: Yeah.

Jacob: So what's the role that leaders play there?

Arun: Yeah, so I give my personal experience, it's [inaudible 00:51:15] five grades or six grades. I would say that you have to be patient but efficient, right? So, meaning you gotta be, you cannot sacrifice speed, because things are happening [00:51:30] so fast, you won't have time, and it's not like oh one year I'll wait and let me do this, it's not that. You have to have faster than that, so you gotta be patient, but at the same time you can't go too fast because the risk is high, too, and you may not provide value.

The second thing is this holistic leadership thinking, which is extremely important for this function as a leader, and I'll tell you why. I lead, and most Talent Analytics leaders do this, I lead a bunch of smart people, very smart people who are in extremely [00:52:00] high demand, and then I report to people who are very, very smart. So my

job as a leader is to tell my team that when HR failed in [inaudible 00:52:12] let's say in that sentence, and I [inaudible 00:52:15] tell my leaders that when my team failed in HR, so if you just go one way or the other it becomes very hard, so this is a leader's quality which is required to be calm, understand what your leaders are trying to tell you, making sure [00:52:30] that not everything is solved by numbers, when to go chase numbers, when not to touch numbers. So you know, those are the pieces that are very, very important. I spend a lot of time in that space because that's how I, that's who my consumers are, and who my team is.

The third thing is, this I learned very good from my boss and it's very applicable right now, is like in this function you will have to do a lot more than, because you'll be introducing new things, [00:53:00] right? Like for example, ONA for example, Organizational Network Analysis. My first [inaudible 00:53:05] of Organizational Network Analysis did not go that great, and then she gave me very good advice, and she said Arun, if you are leading this it's new to us, we have no idea what you're trying to tell us. You have to take the lead, you have to work this whole thing out. Don't expect people to come and help you, and she was so right. Meaning, in this example if you're working particularly with the zone of debate you have to be very close [00:53:30] with your IT teams. You have to pick the right IT partner. You will have to project manage [inaudible 00:53:36] which might include talking to procurement, making sure it moves fast, explaining the signs to everybody, and explaining the signs depending on the audience.

So there is a lot of this pm related work which kicks in, and my first to be very honest, the first time I did this I said why the hell am I doing all that? I am the analytical person, I am not doing that. That was my reaction. [00:54:00] The second time, right now we are doing really good work with networks, and learning that sign's better, it came in so handy. It's one of the best advices my boss has given, on top of other great advices she gives. But this is something the typical analytical leader will not think we should do, we should connect we should do, I mean they should.

Then the third piece is you gotta be a catalyst of other analytical cohorts, right? To your earlier question of who [00:54:30] should it sit [inaudible 00:54:31] officer, should it be with an HR, because as a leader you gotta connect with what they're doing, how they're doing, how we can share resources, how we can share thinking, so that's kind of another leadership quality which you'll need to have.

And the fourth piece is that you will have to work with a bunch of different stakeholders in this. Is [inaudible 00:54:55] HR business partner or your HR talent and you, you'll have to explain [00:55:00] this to business people, you might be working with finance, you'll be working with IT, you'll work a lot with legal and data privacy. So there's that skill set of how you jell in with a multi-stakeholder group at different levels of analytics. So that becomes, it's the whole metaphor I gave to a Jackie Chan fan, and Stanley Cooper.

Jacob: And I happen to like both of those by the way, Jackie Chan and Stanley Cooper.

Arun: But you're special.

Jacob: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, that's, my mom used to tell me I was [00:55:30] special growing up and I still believe it today, so definitely very special. And my wife would also say that I am special, but maybe not in a nice way. But anyway, that's a topic for another podcast. Next question for you is around where to start, so I know we're wrapping up, we have a couple minutes left, so where should we start inside of our organizations so people that are listening to this that are thinking of really making investments in people [00:56:00] in Talent Analytics, where do you begin?

Arun: So I would say the leadership level. Just pick one or two things which will create value, and this can be solved using analytics. So don't start implementing large scale programs and clean up data or [inaudible 00:56:21] because you don't have much time to be very honest. A good way to start is, where are you on your journey, pick the [inaudible 00:56:29] make sure, [00:56:30] so if someone is starting for the first time that is what I would say. Pick two or three projects. Someone who's in the middle, like in the middle of, let's scale it for everybody, so again, come back and do the exact same thing. What value did I create? Can I stop something, can I start something, can I continue something? And some of those on the extreme are doing great stuff, just tell me who you are because I need to learn from you.

Jacob: I think that's a pretty good place to start. So nothing too complicated, nothing too crazy, [00:57:00] start with someone simple.

Arun: Yeah. And that creates value.

Jacob: Yeah, that creates value. Okay. And last question for you, just because I'm kind of interested in this as well, what do you think most employees should know about Talent Analytics that are not in HR, right? Because I'm sure there are a lot of people in sales, in marketing, in operations, in just lots of other roles inside of the company that really have no idea what Talent Analytics is or that it even exists inside of their companies. [00:57:30] What would you say to them? Should they be worried that there's data being collected on them, should they be okay with everything? What do you tell people that really just have no idea what's going on in this area?

Arun: I think it's like what value you create. Sometimes we get stuck in this how you do it, but why you do it is what you need to focus on. When you look at this function as a whole, I'm just making a very broad statement, right, this function as a whole, you made decisions that the right talent stays, you [00:58:00] performed well, we perform well, the company performs well, we have less stress, we have more energy, so we are more engaged. Think about it, like this is what this function really does, HR does. So, it's not about, and to be for the so called data centers, when your sample is won it is very bad, you don't, we can't do any analysis on that, so we don't do that and we look at things from the top, there's no [00:58:30] compromise in that. So it's actually a great challenge.

As I said, I was an engineer before, and it's not as easy as people think [inaudible 00:58:38] I think it's the value it creates. It's tremendous. And it's direct connection. Like for us we save lives, right? At Pfizer we make drugs, so for us it's that connection. If you have the right talent, and same thing for other companies in terms of what your

company's vision is. And so I think it's huge in my opinion, and so my advice would be [inaudible 00:58:59] [00:59:00] last thing I would say that his is a great place to explore. In fact I just hired a clinical psychologist to be honest in my team.

Jacob: Wow.

Arun: Yeah, it's like amazing. Like they are loving it. They're like oh this is very challenging and at the same time very interesting.

Jacob: Yeah. Psychology is also another area that's growing and I think working very closely with the analytics teams.

Well, I think those are all the questions I had. I mean is there any last parting words of wisdom that you wanna give [00:59:30] listeners of the podcast when it comes to Talent Analytics?

Arun: I think keep listening to what you're saying. Thank you for doing all these.

Jacob: It was the best piece of advice, I love it.

Arun: Perfect. Cheers.

Jacob: Well where can people go to learn a little bit more about you? I know you've published a couple of things on LinkedIn where you talk about Talent Analytics with David Green. So anything you wanna mention for people to connect with you and learn more about this, please do so.

Arun: Sure, LinkedIn is the only way I'm connecting with people so feel free to [01:00:00] ask questions [inaudible 01:00:03] please feel free to use that.

Jacob: Perfect. Well, Arun, thanks for taking timeout of your day to speak with me.

Arun: Great, thanks Jacob. Take care, bye.

Jacob: My pleasure, and thanks everyone for tuning into this week's episode of the podcast. My guest again has been Arun [inaudible 01:00:18], global head of Talent Analytics at Pfizer. I will see all of you guys next week.