



Chief Human Resources Officer to Chief People Officer: Changing Roles, Current Realities and Future Directions

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Introduction

The volatile and changing health care market is relentless. How do organizations cope with dramatic transformation? How do executives strategize for long term success and sustainability?

Health care organizations and their people are fully embracing innovation and teaming as they chart new directions for organizational and personal growth. As their businesses evolve to meet the known and unknown challenges and opportunities of the future, the stewards of the people functions of their organization, whether they are called, Chief Human Resources Officer, Chief People Officer or Chief Talent Officer are also called on to evolve.

Indeed, rather than terming it an “evolution” of the role of the Chief Human Resources Officer, it might be better termed a “revolution” where they take a prominent role in shaping organizational culture and its future. To accomplish this, however, leaders will have to build-on their expertise and gain new competencies. Increased experience in the areas of data, workforce engagement, and behavioral science are just a few examples of the new knowledge required. The responsibilities of the CHRO are endless—from transactional to highly strategic - and critical to the successful operation of today’s health care organization.

[InveniasPartners](#)’ perspective is anchored in interviews conducted with multiple CHRO executives, health care C-Suite executives, and national thought leaders working in the health care human capital arena. Our report outlines four trends, including evolving needs for talent strategy, business operations skills, workforce engagement, data analytics and Board, CEO and Leadership advice as well as practical guidelines to take action.

We hope you enjoy this study on the strategic competencies required of Chief Human Resources Officers working to transform the future of health care.

Curt Lucas and Joe Fournier
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Business Architect

Now and in the future, whether they are called Chief Human Resources Officer, Chief People Officer or Chief Talent Officer, a thorough understanding of the health care business and how their organization operates is required. It is important to understand the P&L and have the financial acumen and political savvy to complement more traditional human resources skills and experience. With a mandate to deliver on both business and clinical performance to champion innovation, these talented leaders are taking on new roles and responsibilities.

The need for Chief People Officers (CPOs) with strong financial and operational acumen, insights, knowledge, and skills is more critical now than ever as organizations transform to meet local, regional and national demands. Every day, executives are considering how to deliver consistently safer, compassionate and more affordable care to their patients, families and communities against the backdrop of highly competitive and fluctuating local, regional and national markets. Today, nearly every health care meeting, conference or roundtable talks about some aspect of population and consumer health, re-organization, digital strategy, technology, consumerism, expense reduction, innovation, competition and growth.

For CPOs, the issues are quite complicated. Increasingly, boards and their chief executives expect them to tackle much more significant matters around talent, organizational design and effectiveness, workforce planning and culture and engagement while fulfilling ongoing expectations around compensation and benefits, labor and employee relations, payroll, compliance and recognition. This must all be done with a human touch while advocating for the business and its people simultaneously. The CPO, through human resources, connects to every division, department and employee, which provides a unique opportunity to truly represent the voice of the people to the leadership team. To be successful, CPOs will need to constantly re-orient themselves and their functions to meet these expectations and provide even higher levels of service with fewer resources.

Planning for New Markets and Products

Currently, CPOs function on three levels: strategy, tactics and operations, according to Victor Buzachero, former senior vice-president and CHRO at Scripps Health, San Diego. Most are part of the enterprise executive team that builds and updates the strategic plan to communicate what the organization will achieve over the next four-to-five years. They are also responsible for ensuring the organization recruits and retains talented people with the skills and competencies to implement the plan.

New products, services and markets often demand changes in structure, day-to-day management and newly defined measures of success as evidenced by the industry’s migration to ambulatory care, digital health, population and community health management and risk. “Health care CHROs must assume an active role in plan implementation,” says Buzachero. “A strategic plan is only as good as the C-Suite, senior and board executives who are committed to and involved in its execution.” Part of that implementation involves the design of management systems that align teams with desired outcomes and strategic objectives. Compensation and incentive systems, for example, align pay with performance and bridge financial operations with strategic objectives.

“Health care executives and managers can try to increase performance from the top down, but they won’t achieve change. Only when you fully involve staff can you boost and sustain clinical and business performance.”
– Vic Buzachero



CHROs also provide expertise on workforce planning and productivity, ensuring that overall labor expense is appropriate. Many assume accountability for the bottom line by managing total labor spend, while taking on functions like health plan management and employee wellness and engagement. “As leaders, we have the capacity to develop board and C-Suite executives and the infrastructure required to move health care organizations toward value-based care and revenue-generating accountable care organizations,” says Buzachero. “The key is to create a culture that will move the system forward.”

“As the industry transitions from inpatient care and fewer ER visits to ambulatory care and population health management, CHROs must support C-Suite executives by exploring human resources implications of new markets, products and services,” according to Joline Treanor, a recognized CHRO leader with experience at Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System in Baton Rouge, LA and at Irvine, California-based St. Joseph Health.

“Hospitals and systems now deliver a broader scope of services where a nurse within a hospital could easily become a nurse within a clinic.” The goal, says Treanor, “is to analyze hiring and turnover costs and offer retool and reskill opportunities that move talent into adjacent markets or related businesses.”

Industry-wide convergence is also occurring as providers, payers, tech start-ups and other partners join forces to pursue joint research and product development ventures. That means understanding the needs and functions of a newly reconfigured business—what will work and what is possible. “Performance funds what an organization can achieve in the future,” says Buzachero. “If the system fails to perform on clinical and business metrics, it will lack the cash flow to underwrite strategic investment and development.”

“If health care CHROs aren’t well-versed in business and strategy, the CEO will relegate them to implementation of strategic designs,” adds Treanor. “C-Suite executives seek CHROs who are seasoned business leaders, not traditional HR professionals.”

Board, CEO and Leadership Advisor

Boards and executives are grappling with tough issues at the patient, community, industry and enterprise level. And with an increasing emphasis on people issues related to succession planning, inclusivity and diversity, and workforce engagement, the Chief People Officer is being called-on to provide well-rounded, forward-looking, savvy advice to these decisionmakers.

“The best CHROs know how to use the highly-prized skill of emotional intelligence to dissect the impact of a decision on varied constituencies”, according to says Sue Kopfle, who served over a decade as CHRO at University of Missouri Health Care (MU Health). “Once CHROs display their emotional intelligence, C-Suite and board executives count on them to think through the people side of decision making,” she says.

CPOs are also being asked to take steps to reduce expenses, increase revenues, and address challenges related to quality, cost, access, equity, and outcomes. Instead of waiting for the board and CEO to ask about the people implications of enterprise strategies and plans, most successful CPOs address current needs and lay pathways to long-term innovation. That creates a kind of ripple effect as other leaders truly recognize how and why their organization’s people are their most valuable resource.

Rather than viewing human resources simply as a cost center or management function, health care CEOs increasingly see their Chief People Officer as a business partner that views strategy, plans and programs through a people lens—both as an advocate for the organization and its people. CEOs want their CPOs to mold their senior leadership team’s view on the role of people and how they align to every aspect of the business. This requires the CPO to advocate for both the business and its people at every opportunity and to encourage all leaders to take personal and visible ownership for people matters in their respective areas.

CEOs also rely on the CPO as a key partner in leading and building the executive team. Boards and CEOs want and expect their senior executive teams to work together effectively. The concept of a unified executive team working together might seem simple. Though, in reality, senior executive teams need clear direction, communication and leadership that encourages strong team work, rather than individual success. Often, this means that the CPO must partner closely with the CEO to create an environment where the team can work together effectively. Indeed, this responsibility is often very time consuming—and requires the political savvy to be colleague, coach and team builder.



Workforce Planner

The CPO is expected to define the talent needs of the organization for today and tomorrow. That means building plans to balance the labor supply and demand of key talent over time, and directing the organization's actions to ensure that it has the right people, in the right place to make the greatest impact. With advances in technology and analytics, human resources must use data and technology to determine best how to support talent acquisition, mobility, learning and development.

"Finding the right talent begins with the talent already on board. The key is to redeploy or move around talent to facilitate clinical and business performance," says Buzachero. "Organizations should never regard people as disposable, Instead, they should reconfigure and recombine talent to trigger and sustain performance excellence and build a more productive, engaged workplace culture."

In San Diego, Scripps' initial talent development strategy was launched to catalyze Scripps Health as a destination workplace where executives, managers, clinicians and employees could maximize contributions to system success while growing their careers. He notes that Scripps' goal continues to be developing leaders via management communication and coaching toward excellence. This approach led to the deployment of lean process improvement throughout the organization. Managers in the patient care units, regularly coach staff on how to improve processes and outcomes and excel at their jobs. Staff members now respond with ideas and innovations to curb waste and streamline workflows. And the results are impressive: Scripps has recognized a more highly engaged staff, lower patient dissatisfaction scores and enhanced staff satisfaction and engagement.

MU health has begun this work in earnest too. During MU Health's most recent round of position evaluations, which involved 450 managers, only ten departments benefitted from enhanced recruitment initiatives. Position analyses are repeated each quarter. During her tenure, CHRO Kopfle has responded to the challenge with a "hard-to-fill" position decision matrix which poses five questions:

1. How much time does it take the system to fill a position—from the moment a requisition lands on HR's desk to position acceptance?
2. What's the turnover rate of each unit, department, division or business?
3. What's the overall rate of turnover? How many people leave MU Health each year?
4. What's the rate of "churnover"? How many people change positions, but remain within MU Health?
5. How strong is MU Heath's talent pipeline? How many applications await review compared to the number of applications actively solicited via recruitment programs?

Kopfle discovered the answers to these questions were critical to developing a scorecard to guide conversations with her team. If departments and divisions receive a low total score, Kopfle would recommend a fresh set of recruitment techniques. She concedes that even though CFOs are the traditional guardians of facts and figures, health care CHROs can paint a compelling picture of an organization's status by leveraging data to address trends related to talent.

A similar scenario plays out at St. Joseph Health where Treanor highlights a reliance on data and analytics to reduce unwanted turnover, identify trouble spots, improve recruitment success and allocate compensation based on business and clinical outcomes. HR leadership regularly analyzes the costs of recruitment and turnover in order to generate targets for improvement. Treanor and her team focused on shaving turnover and boosting retention to generate an impact on the organization's bottom line.

Steward for Culture and Engagement

As champions for culture and engagement, CPOs and their team human resources professionals provide the tools, techniques and expertise on to engage the workforce and orient the culture to successfully fulfill the mission. This is perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of the role because the CPO acts as the steward, not the owner. Moreover, every department requires different actions and the CPO must ensure that the human resources function is equipped to meet departments where they are on their journey.

CASE STUDY:

"Culture eats strategy for lunch," says Kopfle in discussing the evolution of the MU Health system's "culture of yes" initiative, at first a 14-week process to illuminate MU Health's values and culture. What started out with posters, which put a spotlight on values like integrity morphed into a series of four simple calls to action: *Care, Deliver, Innovate and Serve*. Acceptance by the workforce was rapid. In the first quarter following program launch, 38% of the workforce understood the "culture of yes" program. Within a year, more than 90 percent could articulate the platform and its values.

To sustain program results, the HR staff "round" on every employee every month, posing two questions:

- Can you tell me about the "culture of yes"?
- Can you explain the "culture of yes" behaviors, including those you perform well and those that remain a challenge?

Kopfle also redrafted performance evaluations to embody the initiative. Fifty percent of each performance evaluation now covers the "culture of yes," including how well an employee exhibits these behaviors.

Managers and executives distribute coupons of recognition to employees who demonstrate "culture of yes" behaviors. Employees can, in turn, submit these coupons and receive gift certificates. Similarly, employees can also recommend a colleague deserving of a "culture of yes" thank you card that reads: "Sam Smith wants to recognize you," followed by the signature of a supervisor, manager or executive.

"Employees, managers and supervisors mount and display their 'culture of yes' cards and coupons rather turning them in," says Kopfle of the program's impact on employee engagement and culture. "Community residents visit the facility and experience a culture that's unbelievably positive and welcoming."

It's widely recognized that leaders, through their words and actions, create an environment that shapes the culture and determine whether employees are engaged or disengaged. Indeed, engaged employees provide superior care and service to patients and customers, which translates to more engaged and loyal patients and customers. The CPO, as a member of the executive team, plays the role of principal communicator, coach and expert for the executive team on matters of culture and engagement. Generally, human resources, either independently or in partnership with another function, deploys the measurement tool for engagement, collects and interprets the data, and prescribes follow-up action plans. The CPO must put ongoing discussion about engagement at the top of the executive team's agenda.

As the champion and expert communicator on engagement, CPOs need to fully engage the workforce to ensure "consistent commitment" to the organization's mission, vision, values, and strategic goals, according to Amy Rislov, a recognized CHRO who served over twenty years at Milwaukee-based Aurora Health Care. The challenge



is especially significant given the recent surge in millennial employees and managers. Organizations like Aurora Health Care are deciding how to tailor education and training to the lifestyle and technology preferences of individuals and teams via enhanced coaching and mentoring programs.

While a recent assessment by McKinsey & Company confirmed the strength of Aurora's culture, Rislov acknowledges an ongoing institutional need to "align performance expectations with executive behaviors, deliver targeted learning experiences and acquire and develop talent throughout the enterprise." Equally vital is mobilizing Aurora's C-Suite and senior leaders to develop their own plans for talent recruitment and development, including onboarding, assessment, coaching mentoring, education and succession planning.

Mission Based Cultures

Engagement is equally important within Catholic health care where health care systems like St. Joseph Health invite employees, managers, clinicians and executives to reflect on and develop the spiritual dimension of their work identities. "We would continually preach to the workforce. Whatever they do extends our healing Christian ministry to the poor and vulnerable," reflects Treanor. "We invite everyone to reflect on that responsibility and participate in reconnecting with the mission, vision and values of St. Joseph Health."

St. Joseph Health maintains a compensation philosophy based on incentive pay, according to Treanor, with incentives anchored in variables employees can actually control. The message is to the workforce is clear: Fulfill our mission of "continually improving the quality of life of the people in the communities we serve while performing according to the values of dignity, service, excellence and justice, and St. Joseph Health will reward you."

The organization has also implemented a wellness clinic that offers employees access to primary care physicians and other health practitioners. By locating the clinic close to employees, the system has reduced time away from work and encouraged employee and family member engagement in health and health care.

St. Joseph Health invites employees to participate in biometric screenings that report on variables like blood pressure, cholesterol levels, blood sugar levels, disease risk, body mass index and triglyceride levels. If employees reach their weight target and schedule a follow-up appointment with a physician, St. Joseph Health offers them pedometers with invitations to compete with other employees for a step award. Employees who rate exceptional on patient satisfaction and performance to budget are eligible to receive enhanced compensation with additional incentives for employees who take proactive control of their health via wellness programs.

"Culture is what makes the difference. Attracting the best talent means being the best workplace in health care, if not the world," says Buzachero. "Health care organizations that emerge as destination workplaces don't need high-cost recruitment programs because people are drawn to the environment and culture."

"Culture is what makes the difference"

- Vic Buzachero

Health care CHROs: Building a Career that Matters

How can CHROs develop the knowledge, skill and experience required to transition into 2020 (and 2030) champions of human capital management? Following are recommendations from human resources leaders:

Operational Excellence

Balance the old with the new: "CHROs still need technical skill, competence and experience in compensation and benefits, legal, employee relations, affirmative action and technology," according to Kopfle. "What's new," she says, "is a growing demand for right brained functionality among senior C- Suite and board executives—especially CHROs in health care."

Emerge as the neighborhood Apple store: "Just as Apple stores are staffed with people who help customers use technology to connect with resources, HR departments must emerge as talent management advisors," predicts Buzachero, "counseling employees, managers and executives on career development via assessment, coaching, mentoring, and online and active learning."

Facilitate automation and access: Automation is everywhere—from benefits, compensation and recruitment to performance appraisals, employee physicals and requests for leaves of absence. "Why should employees go to HR these days?" asks Buzachero. "What's the value of an HR connection? And how can the HR function enrich its relationship and communications with executives, managers, clinicians and employees?"

Get involved with every aspect of the business: Present the CPO role and the HR function as vital to top clinical, operational and financial performance and delivery of the organization's value proposition. "The health care CHRO (aka H-CHROs) and senior HR leaders need as complete an understanding of the business as operations executives," says Kopfle. "They must articulate the nature of the business opportunity and how it might influence patients, consumers, providers, employers and communities."

Talent Vision

Address complex organizational needs: "Diverse operations—urgent care, home care and inpatient care— demand diverse talent," says Buzachero. "CHROs must take a broad view, building and managing systems that benefit the entire enterprise."

Orchestrate talent acquisition and development: "The CHRO's role is to recruit, engage and deploy talent via succession planning and performance management," says Buzachero. "Incentivizing performance facilitates productivity, satisfaction and engagement." Scripps, for example, offers a "success sharing" program where employees earn two days of pay for exceeding performance targets.

Make new friends: Rislov predicts consolidation of C-Suite roles and responsibilities, and the emergence of newer C-Suite positions focused on innovation, transformation, population health and increased number and range of IT related roles. Use your talent blueprint to be central in the process of recruiting new leaders



Expand your bandwidth: CEOs tend to reject and replace CHROs who present narrow areas of expertise like compensation or recruitment rather than contribute a more expansive approach to talent management. They also tend to dismiss CHROs whose chief skill is defined as being a “people person.” CHROs with a highly humanistic bent may focus on associate satisfaction and creating an environment of positivity, but they tend to neglect clinical and business performance.

Strategic Perspective

Think more about the future: “CPOs can’t just think about today or they’ll be ten steps behind,” says Kopfle. “They need a strategy to move talent forward, address organizational needs and identify the next wave of senior, C-Suite and board executive talent. They must ask the right questions and know the answers.” Adds Buzachero: “CHROs play an invaluable role in helping health care systems achieve strategic objectives, manage and mobilize talent, and increase the capacity of learning systems to take on industry and enterprise wide change.”

Prepare for disruption and flex for success: CHROs must prepare for ongoing change and disruption precipitated by everything from new regulations, cybersecurity crises and medical errors, to mergers, acquisitions and competitive threats. Invest time now in self-study to become a valuable strategic asset to your organization. The playbook is changing, so readiness is crucial to getting and staying in the game.

Commit to solving problems - Think like a venture capitalist as you identify opportunities, calculate the return on investment, and partner with others to share the initial risk. Be an astronaut pushing to boundaries based upon thorough testing and exceptional teamwork. Start each meeting with an exercise to promote fresh ideas, focus on the toughest issues and always wrap up with action plans and accountability.

Connections

Reach out and connect with colleagues: Forge relationships with every facility, division, department and profession - from marketing, information technology, medical affairs and finance to nursing, operations, development and transformation. Bring people together to communicate and collaborate within inter-professional teams.

Meet with CPOs in other health care organizations and industries: Develop and access members of a personally selected panel of mentors or board of advisors. CPOs from other industries—from hospitality and financial services to entertainment and retail—bring fresh perspectives on recruitment, engagement, development and retention to health care CPOs.

Engage with communities and causes: Rislov, for example, serves as the chair of the Center for Healthcare Careers in Southeastern Wisconsin, an organization where area health care systems are collaborating with education organizations, the community, and government agencies to assure the necessary workforce for health care. She has also been involved with TEMPO Milwaukee, an organization dedicated to elevating women executives,

The Way Forward

Master the organization’s inner workings: More than just political savvy, understand how the enterprise works. Rislov occupied diverse roles before becoming CHRO at Aurora. She launched her career in recruitment and moved through a series of progressively more responsible positions, including senior vice-president of human resources operations, which led to the opening of two new facilities and service on governing boards.

As InveniasPartners’ looks to the future, we are confident that high performing organizations will continue to make their people a top priority. It means having a deeper understanding at all levels—from the board to the front line—of the value people bring to the organization every day through their thoughts and actions, individually and collectively. As discussed above, CPOs will need to fulfill the traditional expectations of their role while engaging their organizations and people along new paths related to population and consumer health, re-organization, digital strategy, technology, consumerism, expense reduction, innovation, competition and growth. As Board, CEO and leadership advisors, they must be poised to lead on all people strategies while advising on broader strategies to position their organization for success.

Every member of the senior leadership team has a responsibility to contribute to a people strategy that serves the organization. Looking ahead, we believe that the Chief People Officer must be **the Talent Architect** and steward the development of a comprehensive **talent blueprint**, which will become a necessity rather than a luxury. The talent blueprint is a technical, practical and feasible strategic plan that is tied to a well-defined and articulated business strategy.

We are also seeing a move of the CPO into Chief of Staff or Chief Administrative Officer roles, based on their broader experience in strategy and operations. The new breed of CPOs will interact and engage with multiple constituencies—from employers and consumers, to community leaders and government officials. Doing so will ensure that the health system acquires and develops the best talent available and sustains a workforce that delivers on its value proposition. We also believe workforce planning using robust people analytics will accelerate. Innovation at the leadership level and on the front line every day is the key to preparing for the future, especially in health care. If the work doesn’t change, the results won’t change. Past success can be an obstacle or a springboard for your organization and your people.

Another theme to watch is transformation, organizational design and effectiveness. As organizations adjust their operations to better serve their patients, customers and communities, CPOs will be instrumental in providing the expertise, tools and techniques around transformation and operational efficiency and in linking their employee experience to the patient and customer experience. For sure, transformation is much more than re-drawing the boxes and lines on an organizational chart. In transformation, **form must always follow function**. The work of the institution – patient care, research, education and population and community health – will govern the work and organizational structure. The rise of **behavioral science and technology** is also something to watch. Using



data analytics, artificial intelligence, and robotics to measure factors like engagement, satisfaction and turnover, qualifications and fit for roles is accelerating. The true impact of learning and education programs will be enhanced abilities to predict and guide business and clinical decisions. Chief People Officers are champions of the core beliefs and organizational culture, areas that are hard to measure but essential to organizational success. This area of work is proving that if behavior doesn't change, the results won't change.

Finally, the CPO must be the **steward and champion for culture and engagement**. They will sustain their roles as chief engagement and experience officers by orienting employees, managers, executives and clinicians to the organization's mission, vision values, culture and strategic agenda. An organization's savvy competitors can replicate many of its processes, but they can never replicate what defines an organization most—its people and culture. Everyday, leaders think critically about how to shape the culture of the organization to align with its mission and objectives. By providing tools and training to people at all levels, talent will rise to new heights and improve delivery of the work they do for patients, families, customers and each other every day.

About the Authors



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Curt holds a BS in public health administration from Western Illinois University and a master's in health administration (MHA) from Governors State University. While in graduate school, Curt was a national recipient of the Foster G. McGaw Award and served as the President of the ACHE graduate student association.



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Most recently, Joe served as Senior Vice President and Chief People Officer at Intermountain Healthcare, where he nurtured an environment where patients, families, and outstanding caregivers couldn't imagine receiving care or working anywhere else. He also held senior human resources posts in academic medicine including Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) for the University of Michigan Health System, Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) for UMass Memorial Medical Center and UMass Memorial Medical Group. Earlier in his career, he held positions as in-house counsel for UMass Memorial Health Care, as general counsel for the Air Force Medical Service, one of the nation's largest integrated health care delivery systems, and as a military prosecutor.

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