Mervyn Dinnen 0:06

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Mervyn Dinnen 1:05

Welcome to the HR means business podcast, which is part of the HR Happy Hour Network. I'm your host, Mervyn Dinnen. My guest today is Dr. Prerna Tambay from Kingston Business School. She's an engaged scholar, consultant, and one of the few academics who has done pioneering work in the area of HR analytics and digital HR. Her research interests are digital disruption and ethical considerations, and using AI and blockchain to reduce modern slavery, she trained students to play a leadership role in data decision making. Dr. Prerna Tambay, welcome to the HR means business podcast. Would you like to add anything to your introduction?

Dr. Tambay 1:49

Thank you for the generous introduction, and thank you for the invitation. I greatly appreciate so for me, I mean, I looked at data and trend, and I realized that after COVID, we were all surrounded by digital data, and as HR professionals, what do we do about that data? How do you make sense of that data? How do you derive business value from that data? That kept me thinking, and I thought we need more skillful employees, or rather, more HR professionals who can make sense of data, who could tell data driven storytelling, or who could use that data for creating business value. So I self taught myself lot of skills of digitization, the ethical considerations and as well as data visualization, using Tableau, using Power BI and how we could kind of, you know, make sense of that data. And I realized that not many universities are teaching those skills. And here I was at University of Bedfordshire, designing new curriculum which talks about role of HR in digital age, how AI is impacting our future of work. What are the right skill sets we really need to have a within our HR fraternity. And then as a next logical steps that now we understand the data, then how do we analyze that data? How do you tell a story using that data? How do you utilize that data, and where are the gaps? How do you show the ethical considerations? How long do you store the data? How do you kind of, you know, look at those metrics? That was the next logical step. And then I designed a new curriculum which talks about HR analytics and data. So that is me. You're passionate about training future leaders to use data ethically and help leadership to make sense of that data.

Mervyn Dinnen 3:54

So how do you define HR analytics? I mean, you've explained why you think kind of it's essential for modern HR teams and leaders, but how would you define them?

Dr. Tambay 4:05

Okay, so for me, HR Analytics is a team sports. It's making sense of your data, making right decisions, looking at your data, and the skills which you would require is maintenance of data looking at your HRI systems, because HRI system is like a snapshot of your organization, which tells you a lot of things, but you really need to look at the data gradually and how they that data can be utilized For your organizational development, for developing your leadership, and also how that data can be utilized to make decisions which are right for your organization, and that decision can be variety of decisions, say may be improving your customer satisfaction or may be improving your employee engagement. Or hiring the right talent, or perhaps collaborating with people across boundaries. And you really need to understand the financial side of it. You need to understand a little bit of mathematical or statistical angle where you could formulate correlations that if I improve my reward system, does my productivity improve? Does the happiness factor improves? So all that makes HR analytics for me. But a bottom line is, it's not rocket science. Many of those things are common sense, and if you understand how to utilize your HR system effectively. It works well, and you really need to curate that ecosystem where variety of skills come together and work for your organizational development, growth and productivity. Hope I've answered that question.

Mervyn Dinnen 5:57

I think you have, yeah. I think you have, I think you've actually answered some of the next one I was going to ask you as well, but that was, I was, I suppose, yeah, I wondered if you could share specific examples of where HR analytics can and and in your experience, have led to tangible business impacts within organizations that have improved things. I know that you mentioned things like employee engagement just now, but other other what are the examples you would give of where, where the analytics has really made business improvements?

Dr. Tambay 6:30

Yeah, for example, making informed decision, leveraging your HR data, yeah, which can be evidence based data. For example, looking at your absentee rate, looking at your employee turnover. What are the trends which you see in employee turnover? Is it a particular department where you see high turnover, and then you get into granular data? Look at it. What are the various reasons? Is it the distance from your work? Is it the leadership? Is it the lack of training, or is it lack of recognition that kind of helps you to understand what's happening within the organization? A second example could be looking at your equality, diversity, data, lot of organizations say that, you know, they are a fair employer and they champion EDI, yeah. And you, if you look at the ratio of men to women, you might have maybe 50% men and 50% women, or maybe 48% women, 52% men. And when you look at the organization, it looks like, you know, yeah, everything is alright. And we have that men to women ratio more or less right? And we are equality, diversity, inclusion company. But if you get deeper into your HR analytics framework and your HR data, where do these women sit into your hierarchy? Are they at the executive level, or are they not moving across the ladder. What intervention should we be using to bridge that gap? We could also look at the salaries. We could also look at the wage, ah, gap. We could also, I mean, the interventions which may work well or which may not work well, to bring in more women into employment or bring fairness into your employment. Say, for example, you have childcare facilities on the premises. How many people are actually using it, and is that helping our women to move across ladder? So these are some of the things which organization need to kind of, you know, use their data carefully and see the effectiveness of their interventions. Because many time when you have those interventions, you incur a lot of cost in getting those interventions. And are we actually getting value for our money when you are putting those interventions in the right place? Are people taking advantage of those interventions? Another example could be employee well being. Lot of organizations would have yoga classes, lot of organizations provide free gym facilities, lot of organizations would provide lot of facilities to improve the employee well being. But are these facilities working? Are people taking advantage of that, and which are the people who are taking advantage, and that would also tell you some insights into their engagement within the organization. Yeah? Or having just a yoga session doesn't talk about well being, how people react to that. And that data will tell you a lot of important things which would be important for your business.

Mervyn Dinnen 9:43

Okay, which, what are the metrics that you think HR leaders really need to prioritize today? I mean, you've, we talk, obviously, a lot about you've just mentioned things like, well, being things. I mean, are there very specific ones that you think they need to focus on?

Dr. Tambay 10:02

Okay, so there are lot of things we need to the the leaders need to focus on. Are they getting value for their money? Is something they should be first looking at, also looking at your recruitment trends, understanding the skill gaps, yeah, or making sure that you reduce the employee turnover, or perhaps making sure that you use analytics framework in such a way that you have access to the global pool, right? So are we kind of having that knowledge pool within us where you could reach out to people and then maybe create, hold, or buy. These are some of the decisions leadership can make and using your people data, how do you improve your customer satisfaction? Using your people data, how do you improve your product line? For example, I want to get into market with a new product, or I want to diversify my organization. Do I have the right skills? How much time would I require to develop that skill? Or is there any organization or any place where I could buy that skills from? For how long do I have those contracts where I could develop my product or services, and that is saving cost for another metrics which they could look at. Your recruitment cycle, how much time do you require to recruit people? How much is the cost you incur in recruiting people? Can we reduce that cost? What employee engagement strategies or onboarding strategies on onboarding metrics we could look at to enhance that experience, because those people who have good experience of onboarding, there is likelihood that they stay within the organization. So leadership could look at those metrics as well that we have put this intervention in place, and how that intervention is helping us. Leadership could also effectively use AI, for example, having AI in your organizational system, which would help you to do performance reviews in a better way, say, for example, AI giving a manager a nudge, saying performance review is due for XYZ employee, yeah, or perhaps looking at those performance review notes and kind of giving them a unbiased feedback, because research shows that you know, like women get feedback that they need, need to control their emotions, And men get, perhaps a developmental feedback so using AI to generate those feedbacks or to generate those reminders, that could be another thing, and after putting those interventions, have we actually seen a unbiased performance Review, and has that review translated into growth development, engagement, these are some of the things leadership should be looking at. And the main important role leadership need to play is looking at the data and looking at the trends. What is happening within the space in which you are operating is a competitor doing some new strategies, which you really need to incorporate, or perhaps staying away from heights that my competitor has bought this tool, and I need to have it, but making sure that you know how to use that tool. You train people well, yeah, and also you show this from your behavior, that you want to have a data driven approach developing that vocabulary around your organization that also helps as a leader, you need to develop the right vocabulary. You really need to celebrate data driven decisions. Say, for example, if you have recruited a batch of maybe new employees or college graduates, and you have put into interventions in place, and you see tremendous amount of results. So those needs to be celebrated. Or perhaps you have looked at the data, and you know these XYZ team members are looking little volatile. Their timings are not matching with others. They are taking lot of holidays, or this XYZ person is perpetually absent on every Monday morning. And you take a decision of reprimanding that person or giving them a notice or challenging that behavior, those incidences, I mean, you have to be very careful without taking names, but those behavior and that data, trend and utilization of data needs to be celebrated by the leadership. And look at the longer picture that how that data can fit into the entire framework of data driven approach.

Mervyn Dinnen 15:24

There's obviously a lot of data to collect, and I'm sure there are organizations that say we've got all this data, so we know exactly what this is and what this is, but use it. I suppose collecting that data is one thing, but actually using it to influence decision making, to improve things for the people in the organization, influencing, you know, the overall leadership level, the C suite. How do you ensure that that actually happens rather than when it's okay? We've done that. We've, we've, we've done the surveys. We know what everybody thinks, and we just carry on as usual.

Dr. Tambay 16:06

Okay, that's an interesting question, because we gather a lot of data. I mean qualitative data, quantitative data, for example, your demographic data fits into your qualitative Yeah, and then you also conduct lot of pulse surveys. And you would have your annual cultural surveys, and you have lot of organizational network event where data gets generated. You have videos, you have photographs, which is, again, huge amount of data which tells you lot of stories when people leave, we gather a lot of data. When people on board, we gather a lot of data. During the entire life cycle of your employees, it's all about data. How many promotions have they received, or did they have any disciplinary action? What sort of absentee did they have? Did they have any ah, grievances? Did they have any issues with well being or all that is like, you know, it's the digital footprint of your employees and your HR systems and lot of other systems. They gather that data. But as I said in the beginning, the bigger problem with the current HR people may not like it, but what to do with that data is something we all struggle so first thing is developing that right skills. Yeah, and for leadership, establishing the fact that we are implementing a data driven strategy that needs to be communicated across organization. When you talk about data driven strategy, what sort of data do we need for? How long do we need that data? How the data would be utilized. Then around that, you have issues like GDPR privacy, how that data is going to be stored, who's going to be the custodian of that data, and, more importantly, designing and devising data access strategies, who would have access to XYZ data. Who would have access to the next level of data? For how long that would happen? Because we are operating in a digital world, somebody takes a snapshot of my employee data and misuses it. So we really need to understand here we are talking about sensitive information, and that might be problem for your cyber security, and that might put you into ah, legal issues. So we really need to be careful about what our data strategy is all about. Second is investing in the right tools, for example, having that HR systems which are smart, which can communicate across departments because HR, many time, doesn't know what's happening in finance operation doesn't know what's happening in HR. So how those systems can be interacting with each other to create or generate COVID dashboards, which can be utilized for your organizational decision making. But again, as I said that you know, like, HR would need another dashboard, and finance would need another dashboard. So having a system which is powerful, yeah, and having those tools which can generate powerful data, robust data, and which can help people to look at that data and the granularity of that data, which is very important. Third is data driven culture, as I said, that you know, like, what sort of data are you looking at, celebrating that success stories, which where data has been utilized, then also provide. Providing training to access those systems, yeah, showing sensitivity to issues like GDPR and when in doubt, taking help of legal people, or perhaps taking help of organizations who specialize in protecting people data. Yeah. So those are some of the things we should be actually looking at. Then data quality is something which we really need to be careful about. So when you gather the data, make sure that the data is complete, yeah, keep on cleansing your data periodically. Yeah. So these are some of the things we need to look at and also for HR to understand that when people are asking data access to data, yeah, yeah. For example, a statistician is asking access to your data. That does not mean that they are trying to challenge you. It is for the organizational good, yeah, because as HR professionals, we lack that data literacy, let's be honest. Yeah, and we have made a lot of progress, and we need to do a lot of progress, but giving access to right people to understand the correlations also understanding the psychological frameworks of that or maybe the finance incurred in designing and devising those frameworks. Yeah, so those are the things we really need to kind of, you know, build those right ecosystems with right people with right skills, for example, legal, psychological, finance, statistics come together and make sense of that data.

Mervyn Dinnen 21:47

Yeah, and the kind of challenges you've obviously outlined a lot of them, but I suppose culturally, for HR, what are they likely to have to overcome?

Dr. Tambay 21:59

The culturally, the first thing is data literacy, being scared of data, being scared of numbers. Gone are the days when we said that in a HR, we operate through our heart, yeah, we use our heart, yes, but we also use data. We also use numbers, we also use hard facts to make our decision. Yeah. So building that culture, and more importantly, communicating that right culture with the wider organization is important. Leadership needs to play a leadership role, actual leadership role in talking in numbers. We take finance sales people very seriously, because they all the time talking in numbers that these are 10 products I have sold, and I have made this many pounds for my organization. Or perhaps this is the product we have bought. And we I have saved XYZ amount of money for my organization, but for HR, we have recruited this XYZ talent. They have Steed in my in my organization, for may be straight five years, they have been productive. They have got innovation, and they have designed this XYZ product. Every penny saved is every penny earned for the organization, and HR needs to create that culture of talking in numbers. Say, for example, I have put in maybe 10,000 pounds in my training and development for my new recruits, and that training and development has translated in this return on investment. Are we in a position to demonstrate that the minute we kind of, you know, talk about our achievements in number, our achievements in return on investment, things would change, and that is part of change in culture. Say, for example, with my AI interventions, I have managed to reduce grievances by 10%. That is an achievement that less unhappy employees, or more happy employees, they have less grievances, would be engaged, would be productive. So these are the ways we really need to bring that culture in. We really need to kind of, you know, tell right stories that this year we have managed to reduce our gender pay gap by 2% that's itself is an achievement, and that would create a better brand for your organization. People would feel more comfortable working within your organization. I would give an example of Deutsche Bank. Yeah. Yeah. Where they encouraged LGBTQ community to work with them, and the business has improved by tenfold. This is a great example. Another in UK, the popular supermarket, Tesco they have welcomed the minority community to come and work within the organization. When somebody who is serving you looks like you, speaks the same language and understands you better as a customer, the spice, spices sales has increased by 250% Can you imagine? So this is, this is the power of human resources, and they need to, kind of, you know, demonstrate that powers in numbers with examples and telling that data driven coherent stories. Yeah. So and simple formula like, how do you calculate return on investment, yeah, how do you calculate your employee turnover ratio, yeah? And if that employee turnover has reduced by 10% how does it translate into the bottom line? So these are some of the things we really need to understand. And universities have a major role to play to teach these skills to our students. And more importantly, we really need to, kind of, you know, bring those debates, and we need to bring those discussions into podcasts like this, into our research, into our summits, which we organize and which we attend. So this has to be part of our vocabulary. Yeah, yeah. It's like we are trying to shift the paradigm. And when the paradigm has to shift, there is more efforts which is required from all across the people who, kind of, you know, formulate that narrative, for example, policy makers, leadership employees, HR practitioners and the wider stakeholders. Yeah, Is that making sense to you?

Mervyn Dinnen 27:20

It is, it is, I think, for and this was a fascinating conversation. I think my final question to you would be: how do you see HR AI evolving, you know, the rise of AI and things; How do you see, you know, if we have this conversation in a couple of years time again, what do you think might have changed?

Dr. Tambay 27:41

AI has come a long way, and HR needs to understand the significance of AI for them, AI is their best friend. Keep that in mind. Yeah. So it's not human versus machine, it's human with machine, how AI can be used effectively to enhance your onboarding experience, how AI can be utilized effectively to do your performance management? How do you generate that unbiased data? How do you generate that clean data? How do you generate that effective data? And if your data gathering process is effective, and if you generate effective and robust data, that data can be used to train your machines. Yeah, so it's not garbage in, garbage out. It's good quality data in and good quality AI processes out that we really need to understand. We need to look at analytics from a different perspective, that what you see, the data, which is in front of you. It tells a story you really need to, kind of, you know, put that jigsaw puzzle together. Say, for example, if I have seen productivity has gone down, what could be the possible reasons? Yeah, do we have skill deficit? Are we struggling financially? Is it the market trend? What my customers are looking into. So looking at the data holistically and moving little bit out of your comfort zone is something the onus lies on us, and also collaboratively looking at data from different with different functions that would definitely help. And if I have to, kind of, you know, talk about AI tools, machine learning, predictive analytics, that what is happening in the space in which you are operating, how the skills based are changing. How AI is helping me to reduce cost, how AI is kind of freeing my bandwidth, which I could utilize to recruit better quality. Yeah. So those are the things we really need to look at. For example, lot of things which we did intuitively when COVID happened? Yeah, yeah. Suddenly offices shut down. People had to work from home, and as a sharp leader, I know lot of stories where HR took a lead. Who are the people who would actually come to the organization? Who are the people who would work from home? How do you make those decisions? Yeah, also, how many laptops do we really need to organize when people are working from home? What sort of trainings do we have to give for people to be comfortable using zoom and teams, for example, in higher education, how do we improve our student engagement when we are teaching online, how do we make sure that we use the right tools to upload our lecture notes, and how do you provide unbiased feedback? Yeah, so those are some of the things which we have done intuitively, but that has to be part of our regular practices. We have used a lot of data to see which are the people who who could have a furlough scheme, who are eligible for furlough scheme, which are the people which are not eligible for furlough schemes, which are the people we had to kind of, you know, make their roles redundant. Those are the things which those decisions, hard decisions, we have done, and we have looked at a lot of data, yeah. And now this is a logical next step to gradually embed ourselves into the field of predictive analytics, into the field of AI and machine learning. And there is lot of knowledge which is floating around. You could use HBR. You could listen to podcast. There is LinkedIn learning. So you really don't need to, kind of, you know, invest a lot of cost going to a university, but there are a lot of things which you could kind of read, which you could make sense of, and getting hold of your HR systems, and taking help from the people who are there available within your organizations. And again, GDPR is something one really need to be careful about. So doing some courses in GDPR, or may be looking at CIPD website. So there is knowledge floating all around the place, but how do we, kind of you know, make sense of that knowledge, and how do you get that place in the C suite is something every HR professional need to think about. And we have, we have so much important role to play. We have so much to showcase that the value we bring to the table for your organization.

Mervyn Dinnen 32:55

It's been a fascinating conversation Dr. Tambay, just before we go. If anybody listening to this wants to connect with you or, yeah, what's, what's the best way?

Dr. Tambay 33:09

They could connect with me on LinkedIn, yeah, Prerna Tambay, they could follow me on Twitter, PTambay, and they could also look at my profile on my university website. It's Kingston University. I am situated in Kingston Business School, yeah. So they could look at my profile, and I would love to, kind of, you know, connect with wider audiences for multiple collaborations. For example, bringing people to my classroom to share their experience. Where, when people still talk, my students still talk about your class, and they really enjoyed it. And next year, I should invite you as well.

Mervyn Dinnen 33:53

Thank you. Thank you.

Dr. Tambay 33:53

Then also research. I'm open to kind of, you know, research collaborations, or perhaps industry report writing, yeah, and sharing that knowledge with the wider audiences. That how you could use Tableau as a HR professional, and how do you kind of, you know, make sense of that data, those are some of the things which I really feel close to my heart.

Mervyn Dinnen 34:20

Yeah, I did. I should explain to listeners that I did deliver a session to one of Dr. Tambay's classes about trends, HR trends, I think. And yeah, it went down really well. So it's no, they're very engaged audience.

Dr. Tambay 34:35

So maybe you have rightly said it's a poor trend. As HR professionals, we really need to understand the data and trends, and 70% of your battle is won when you understand data and trend.

Mervyn Dinnen 34:48

Okay, Dr. Tambay, it's been great chat, and thank you for your time.

Dr. Tambay 34:54

Thank you for inviting me and thank you for making me think about, how much do we do as a. Are professionals. How much value do we add? And we are always shying away from talking about our achievements, yeah, especially in numbers. And I think that culture needs to change.

Mervyn Dinnen 35:10

Definitely! Thank you.

Dr. Tambay 35:13

Yeah, thank you very much.

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