Commercial feature

Q&A
A question of teaching digital HR

The Academy to Innovate HR (AIHR) is the world's leading provider of tuition in people analytics and digital human resources

The AIHR founders Nando Steenhuis and Erik van Vulpen were both 25 years old when they started the company three years ago, so they are digital natives themselves. They now reach more than 200,000 HR professionals around the world every month and educate them on digital and data. Mr van Vulpen answers questions about the skills gap in HR and what action organisations can take to fix it.

Q Is there a skills gap in HR?

A Absolutely. Earlier this week I was in a call with an HR director who has a staff of 550 people of which twenty have technical skills. He needs to quadruple this to at least 80 people with technical skills in the next two years. That is pretty typical. Over time the need for HR professionals to have technical skills will keep growing. Many companies will struggle to find the people they need.

Q How can you help solve this problem?

A We founded AIHR in 2016 because of this skills gap. We started writing about topics like people analytics and digital HR on our blog called analyticsinhr.com. We believe in free knowledge-sharing, as that will push HR forward. Our readers started asking us for courses about people analytics and digital HR. We decided to create educational courses and the rest is history. We're now the largest online educator in people analytics and digital HR in the world.

Q What sets you apart from the rest?

A I think the attraction of our content and courses is their depth and practicality. No one is covering topics like the future of work, digital HR strategy and people analytics in so much detail, making it so practical, while also making it so accessible. Our courses teach HR practitioners skills they can apply at work the next day. We do this by working with the best subject matter experts from all over the world. They are practitioners themselves, so they know the ropes. Also, we are digital natives and believe in the power of technology to change the lives of employees. Our customers like us because we provide high-quality, innovative and practical education. Do you want to learn digital skills and the future of work from an old corporate dinosaur or from digital natives? Obviously the latter. That's how we've been able to grow so quickly.

Q How important is data-driven HR?

A Data-driven organisations outperform on various financial metrics such as profit margins and return on assets. According to McKinsey, digital transformation has risen to the top of chief executives' strategic plans. As an HR professional, you need to understand this process and be able to ask the relevant questions to ensure this transformation will be a success. But there is more to it. A tran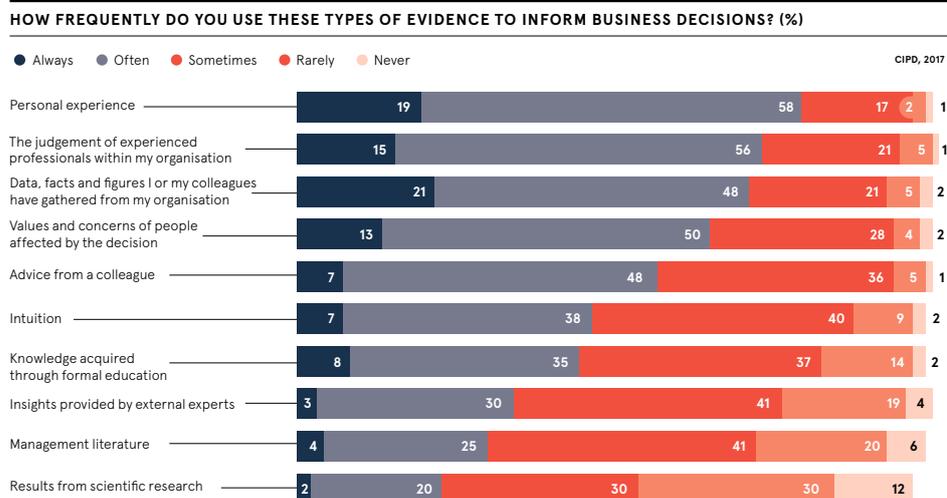sformation isn't something you do in a year. You cannot add a full-time equivalent [hours worked by one employee on a full-time basis] to your payroll for a year to implement it. It's an ongoing process and it needs to be managed by people who understand the process and see how technology can be leveraged for more efficient and effective HR policies.

Q Who are your biggest clients?

A We supply 175 of the Fortune 500 companies, including Nike, EY, UBS, Philips, McKinsey and Tata. The United States is our biggest market, then Europe. We are expanding across Asia and the Middle East too. We now have learners in more than 60 countries.

Q Who enrols?

A The interest is astronomical. We currently draw 200,000 visitors a month to our websites. The typical age is 30 to 50. Most of our courses don't require any specific technical or mathematical background. Naturally, you need to be in an HR role to apply the knowledge but you don't need the technical skills. That is what we teach; we start with the very basics.

Q What courses do you offer?

A We offer different courses and programmes. Popular programmes include the People Analytics Certification Programme and Digital HR Certification Programme. Individual courses include Digital Transformation, HR Analytics Leader Course or the People Analytics for HR Business Partners course.

Q There is an 'all you can learn' option. Is this popular?

A It is our most popular option. You get unlimited access for 18 months. From a user perspective, it makes sense, as when people complete one course they are eager to learn more. We also see companies such as the ones I mentioned earlier buying tuition for entire departments. Our portal can be incorporated into almost all corporate learning management systems, so employees can connect from within their own company portal.

Q Do students miss classroom interaction?

A We offer a community for students to interact online. It's extremely popular. Students can ask questions and get answers from fellow HR professionals from across the world. The instructors participate too. This means that if you have a problem at work, you can get input from our HR practitioner community. This is incredibly useful. We also have a personal coach. This person will always be there for you to answer any questions, help you design your own personal learning path and motivate you to keep going.

Q What is the future for AIHR?

A We want to raise the technical competence of the entire HR industry. It is obvious that HR professionals who can implement and harness data are the ones who will lead the industry and bring significant value to their organisations. We will ensure everyone has a chance to succeed, even those who don't have technical skills or can't use tools like Excel. Our online courses are the fastest way to learn. Any HR professional can enrol and improve. At the Academy to Innovate HR, it is our mission to make HR future-proof by offering world-class online education programmes available anywhere, anytime.

To learn more or enrol please visit AIHR.com

HOW FREQUENTLY DO YOU USE THESE TYPES OF EVIDENCE TO INFORM BUSINESS DECISIONS? (%)

Legend: ● Always ● Often ● Sometimes ● Rarely ● Never

CIPD, 2017

Type of evidence	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Personal experience	19	58	17	2	1
The judgement of experienced professionals within my organisation	15	56	21	5	
Data, facts and figures I or my colleagues have gathered from my organisation	21	48	21	5	2
Values and concerns of people affected by the decision	13	50	28	4	2
Advice from a colleague	7	48	36	5	
Intuition	7	38	40	9	2
Knowledge acquired through formal education	8	35	37	14	2
Insights provided by external experts	3	30	41	19	4
Management literature	4	25	41	20	6
Results from scientific research	2	20	30	30	12