



**Dr. Sjoerd van den Heuvel, People Analytics
keynote speaker / researcher / senior lecturer
at University of Applied Sciences Utrecht**



Dr. Sjoerd van den Heuvel heads the People Analytics research & education at the [University of Applied Sciences Utrecht](#) in the Netherlands. He is an international authority on People Analytics and a frequently asked speaker and chair at HR and People Analytics conferences and in-company training across the globe. He teaches People Analytics for professionals, undergraduate- and graduate students. His research focusses primarily on individual competencies and organizational capabilities required for Successful People Analytics.

Sjoerd holds a Ph.D. degree in Human Resource Management from Tilburg University and prior to his current position, he worked as a senior HR management consultant (Capgemini Consulting), senior Engagement & Retention advisor (Dutch Postal Service) and assistant professor in HRM (University of Amsterdam and Twente University). In both his teaching and research activities, his core focus is on how to bridge the gap between science and practice, because that's where the People Analytics magic happens!

What are the key aspects of employee performance that are critical to the success of HR Analytics?

Interesting question, to make HR analytics a success in an organizational context, you need a mix of competencies. Think about People or HRM related knowledge, skill to convince business leaders so that you can influence decision making, storytelling skills, a curious mindset, knowledge about the IT and data infrastructure in an organization, and so on. And then, of course, excellent data science skills. The thing is, however, that many organizations starting with HR Analytics try to find all these competencies in a single person. Not possible. So making HR Analytics a success, is a matter of collaboration, either internally, or with external parties like consultancies, universities, or business schools. Furthermore, we notice that many HR Analytics maturity models are primarily focused on the analytical maturity, consider for example the well-known 'wall' from John Boudreau, in which you as an organization want to move from reporting and benchmarking to correlation and causality analysis. In our studies, however, we often explore the full KSA model, meaning the full range of Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes that make HR Analytics a success. In other words, making HR Analytics work requires a broad set of KSA's.

How can HR Analytics enhance employee performance?

For me, that's one clear element: the link to strategic business outcomes, or differently put: outcomes related to the primary process of the organization. It sounds so simple, but in the design of so many of our HR Analytics practices, the way this practice actually contributes to business performance is not explicitly considered. Moreover, we see many organizations starting with HR Analytics doing all kind of analyses on purely HR data. And yes, that can bring nice insights, but if it truly improves employee performance...? Not sure. So you notice that in our view we relate employee performance to business performance. This is, therefore, a fundamental element of our vision on HR Analytics. By the way, we, therefore, do not talk about HR Analytics, but People Analytics. Deliberately.

What do CEOs/CHROs look for in employee performance analytics?

Well, there is a difference between what they look for and what they SHOULD look for. One element I would like to address is the present focus in metrics, not an analytics. Not to say that metrics are totally useless, but we should realize that metrics are nothing more than aggregated data. So a large amount of data, organized in an understandable manner, for example in averages, or counts, or ratios. Compare it to the well-known KPI's, all KPI's are in essence metrics. For example, the metric 'number of calls answered' for a call center employee, does not tell us much. What's better? 3 calls answered in an hour or 16? For example, what do you like more: 3 calls answered in which the client issue was solved, of 16 calls answered in which the problem is not resolved and the client satisfaction score of the call a disappointing. So in employee performance analytics, I would advise CEO's en CHRO's, look for the relationships. And then preferably the relations with strategic business outcomes.

What is missing in terms of employee performance data that could make HR Analytics even more meaningful?

What I would like to see is that we increasingly use more objective data, often automatically collected via sensors, our computer usage, GPS, and so on. I neglect the privacy rules for the moment, but I truly believe we can improve both employee performance and employee wellbeing if we use such data more. Now, much employee data is based on self-reported survey data. But imagine for example that my computer automatically gives me the advice to talk to these 3 colleagues once a week, because the time it has taken me to type all my e-mails to them exceeds the predicted face-to-face contact time with a factor 5.

Can HR Analytics play a prescriptive role in helping employee finetune performance real-time?

Well, then the answer to your previous question is relevant. It is possible, but we should then increasingly use system data, that is – in a way – constantly collected, thus updated. A more fundament comment I would like to make in this respect is that we should consider the ownership of HR Analytics. Now, the ownership mostly lies with the organization, the HR Analytics team, or the HR function. Then privacy legislation and ethical consideration considerably limit the possibilities of using employee data to enhance performance. And that good, really, because without it chances are good that it would facilitate exploitative behavior by organizations. Imagine that the ownership for executing HR Analytics lies with the employees themselves, and they can use HR Analytics to improve their wellbeing at work? Or to develop themselves in a more efficient or effective way to make a quick move to a more suitable or desired position in the organization. We truly believe that in People Analytics, individual well-being, organizational effectiveness, and societal wellbeing should be in balance in all People Analytics practices. This may require the involvement of more parties than only the organization, and thus perhaps even the ownership of HR Analytics by employees.
