



The New CHRO Mandate: Scaling the Business, Not Just the Function

For years, when speaking with CEOs, investors, and senior HR leaders, the conversation about the People function often started in a familiar place: talent acquisition, compensation, engagement, culture, and talent management. All important. All necessary. All squarely within the expected remit of a strong HR leader.

That conversation is changing.

Increasingly, I'm hearing a different question from companies hiring People leaders: can this person help the business scale? Not simply run HR. Not simply build the function. But help create the organizational conditions for the enterprise to grow, integrate, and execute without becoming slower.

That distinction matters. Managing the People function is inward facing. It asks whether the machinery of HR works. Scaling the business is enterprise-facing. It asks whether the organization has the leadership, structure, incentives, decision rights, and operating rhythm to deliver the strategy. The strongest CHROs still need to know the fundamentals, but the executives and investors I speak with are looking for something broader: a People leader who understands how organizational capability becomes business performance.

This is especially true across growth-stage, PE-backed, and acquisitive businesses, where complexity often grows faster than the organization can absorb it. A company grows through acquisition, but the operating model remains informal. A founder-led culture professionalizes, but no one wants bureaucracy. A leadership team expands, but decision rights are still relationship-based. Revenue scales, but the management system underneath it has not caught up.

The next-generation CHROs who stand out now are not only making the function more mature; they are making the business more capable. In many searches, companies are becoming less impressed by tenure alone and more focused on what a leader has actually built, led, or changed. Twenty years of CHRO experience is not automatically more compelling than five years of success in a complex environment. Has this person created clarity where there was ambiguity? Helped a leadership team scale? Integrated acquisitions without eroding what made the acquired business valuable? Introduced structure without slowing the company down?

This changes how companies should assess People leaders. Business context matters more than ever, and there is no one-size-fits-all ideal CHRO. The work is not simply to install HR best practices. It is to decide which practices the business actually needs, when it needs them, and how to introduce them in a way that improves execution rather than merely increasing activity. That requires commercial judgment. It also requires courage.

The most compelling CHROs I meet can sit with CEOs, CFOs, investors, and operators and talk about people in business terms without losing the human element. They understand how talent decisions affect margin, how leadership gaps affect growth, how unclear incentives affect execution, and how culture can either accelerate strategy or quietly protect the status quo. They can be empathetic without being soft, and commercially minded without becoming transactional.

When I hear companies describe the CHRO they want now, I listen carefully to the gap between the job description and the business problem. If the language is all about HR ownership, the search will likely produce a strong functional leader. If the language is about scale, integration, leadership capability, and execution, the search has to be calibrated differently. The question is not only whether someone can lead the People function. It is whether they can help the business operate better.

Hiring teams should spend less time asking whether a candidate has held the exact title in the exact industry and more time understanding the conditions under which that leader has been effective. What kind of ambiguity have they navigated? What have they built from scratch? What have they inherited and improved? Where have they created structure, and where have they resisted unnecessary process? How have they influenced leaders who did not report to them? How have they balanced culture, performance, and pace?

The next generation of CHRO leadership is not about abandoning HR. It is about expanding the definition of what great HR leadership means. The companies that get this right will not hire People leaders simply to manage the function. They will hire leaders who can help create the conditions for the business to scale, integrate, and execute. The companies that get it wrong will keep looking for bigger titles, larger teams, and familiar logos, and may miss the more important question underneath the search: does this person understand how talent, structure, incentives, leadership capability, and operating rhythm translate into business performance?

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