

Executive Summary

Leading the people function

Five key attributes of chief
people officers — whether
day one, 100 or 1,000



The empathetic economist

In 340 BC, the Greek philosopher Aristotle introduced the idea of the “golden mean”: the perfect center or balance between two extremes. For Aristotle, you could only achieve the golden mean if you had experienced both sides.

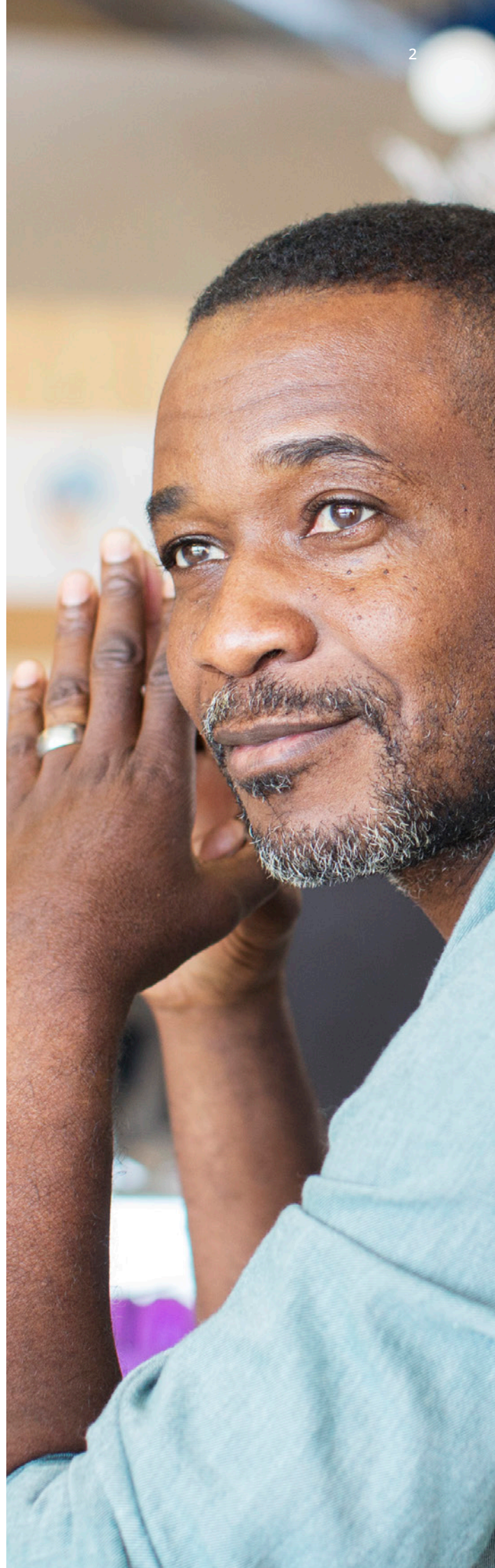
Balancing the needs of employees and of a business’s strategic goals, so as to reach a golden mean, lies at the heart of a CPO’s role. Lean too much in any one direction and “the light dims.” This is a tough ask, and it takes a special set of skills — one that blends empathy and economics — to generate bright futures for both people and profits.

With work evolving at an accelerated pace, the CPO role itself is rapidly expanding. What once was considered crucial to the people strategy has become simple table stakes. Now, CPOs are relied upon to:

- Build new relationships and partnerships both within the organization and with external stakeholders
- Drive innovation outside the confines of foundational HR programs in order to impact the business more broadly
- Change risk-averse HR cultures into ones that allow for fast piloting and fast failing
- Create programs built for constant iteration and thus change “agnostic” and resilient

Addressing these challenges — while continuing to focus on HR’s core functions — will take courage and skill. This shouldn’t be a problem: Whether your executive role is badged as chief human resources officer, chief people officer or chief human capital officer, reaching the C-suite means you have courage and skill to spare.

However, getting the seat at the top table is only the beginning. Now it’s time to consider the ever-evolving set of skills and requirements you need to grow your role and become the driver of both empathy and economics within your organization. Help is at hand: From our extensive work with CPOs at organizations of all sizes, in key locations around the world, we’ve identified five key attributes that winning people officers deploy — both as leaders of teams and as individuals in their own right.



A job interview with yourself

Yes, you already have the job, but don't sit on your laurels! Why not interview yourself to dig deeper into how you can drive growth in both yourself and your company? The best part? No one's taking notes but you! We've kicked off the interview with the questions below, but you may have a few other things you'd like to ask yourself.

- How does my company make money?
How might this change in the next five years?
- What is my company's future direction?
How is this being shared with stakeholders?
- How is the competitive landscape changing?
- How is the work of our company changing?
- How is our workforce structured?
- What are the implications of the "must-win battles" for talent?
- What is the corporate appetite for bold thinking and fast failing? What cultural norms or "sacred cows" exist?
- What are the five most ambitious things I could accomplish in the next three to five years? What is needed to achieve these goals?
- What has enabled me to successfully bring about change in the past? How will these skills/competencies serve me in the future? What new skills will I need to develop?
- Is our HR function ready to respond to all the changes and challenges ahead?

Five attributes great CPOs deploy



Listener

Effective **listening** sparks innovation and organizational learning, builds trust and psychological safety, and creates and energizes a collective commitment to positive change.



Cultivator

Embracing, promoting and **cultivating** a responsible position on the many different dimensions of inclusivity and well-being drives positive outcomes for people, communities and businesses. Cultivators of inclusivity don't reduce this vital work to a checklist of programs.



Storyteller

Reams of data are an unavoidable part of most HR functions. But data sets mean little if they are not harnessed to plot a way ahead. **Storytellers** turn information into actionable insights, use data to plan strategically and work to create a compelling narrative that all parts of an organization can buy into.



Activator

HR tech is freeing up teams to spend more time on creative problem-solving. **Activators** capitalize on this to help others deliver. They foster execution discipline, operational excellence, and financial and digital acumen.



Transformer

Two pivotal challenges sit before you: redesign work so that talent can seamlessly connect with it, and create an employee experience that meets the workforce on its own terms. **Transformers** harness these key challenges to help their businesses achieve their strategic goals.

You may feel strong in some of these areas, while recognizing your weaknesses in others. But whatever your current skillset, there is a way to capitalize on all your attributes and lead your organization to success through the uncertain and challenging times ahead.

Here's how.


Becoming the ultimate people leader — every day

Successful CPOs know their strengths, upskill their weaknesses and surround themselves with staff with complementary skill sets. It is clear that delivering the “golden mean” — meeting the needs of both employees and the business — is best done by creating and leading an HR team with an optimal balance of skills. For example, cultivating health and well-being takes active listening, data-driven storytelling and the design thinking of an activator.

In your role as leader, arm yourself with the five attributes we've highlighted. These are attributes you can mix and match depending on the needs of the moment. Using this dynamic skill set, you can redesign and radically enhance:

- Work
- Well-being
- The HR function
- The talent experience
- How data is collected and communicated

Ultimately, you and your people can lead your organization into a bright, shared, prosperous future.



The image shows the cover of a Mercer report titled "Leading the people function". The cover features a green background with a photograph of a woman looking upwards. The text on the cover includes the Mercer logo, the tagline "welcome to brighter", the title "Leading the people function", and a subtitle "Five key attributes of chief people officers — whether day one, 100 or 1,000".

Download Mercer's Leading the People Function report to uncover the five attributes that all Chief People Officers need to have and learn how to implement them into your role and organization.

www.mercer.com/Leading-the-people-function

At Mercer, we believe in building brighter futures.

Together, we're redefining the world of work, reshaping retirement and investment outcomes, and unlocking real health and well-being. We do this by meeting the needs of today and tomorrow. By understanding the data and applying it with a human touch. And by turning ideas into action to spark positive change.

For more than 70 years, we've been providing trusted advice and solutions to build healthier and more sustainable futures for our clients, colleagues and communities.

Welcome to a world where economics and empathy make a difference in people's lives.

Welcome to brighter.

