UPDATED WS #139

[00:00:00] **Intro:** Hello, and welcome to Workplace Stories, the podcast where human capital experts share their real-world experiences and insights. Hosted by RedThread Research, Workplace Stories surfaces the latest industry trends, innovative talent strategies, and best practices for success. Tune in for practical advice on how to best transform your workplace

[00:00:22] **Stacia Garr:** Welcome to Workplace Stories.

[00:00:24] **Stacia Garr:** I'm Stacia Garr. Today's guest is Ramesh Karupagani Veeraiahgan, who leads people analytics and employee listening at MassMutual. And I want to take just a few minutes before you hear the conversation to share why I think this one is particularly worth your time. Ramesh came into his role three years ago with a roadmap that pretty much every people analytics leader will recognize.

[00:00:50] **Stacia Garr:** Focused on continuous listening, creating a single source of truth, self-service dashboards, and eventually move to predictive analytics. And that all sounded like a pretty good idea until Ramesh realized that none of it would actually create any value because HR wasn't ready to use it. So he did something most leaders talk about and few do.

[00:01:14] **Stacia Garr:** He spent the next three years building HR's data capability first, and importantly, he treated that upskilling as the adoption strategy for everything else he wanted to build. There's a few things to listen for in this conversation. The first is the transformation in how HR themselves show up. So when Ramesh arrived, the request for, "Give me this data, give me that report."

[00:01:38] **Stacia Garr:** Today, his HR partners open with, "What are we solving for?" And they bring him a hypothesis. You're gonna wanna listen for how they got there, leadership making it a stated priority, training built into people's real work rather than a separate track, and his team coaching HR partners through actual projects along the way.

[00:01:59] **Stacia Garr:** And as I say in the conversation, I can think of little that would better prepare a people analytics team for the AI era than doing this type of work with HR leaders where you're coaching them on the real problems they have and how to reframe their questions. An LLM can generate a

dashboard, but it can't build trust or point a question at business outcomes the way that a person can.

[00:02:26] **Stacia Garr:** In the back half of the conversation, we turn to strategic workforce planning, which MassMutual is standing up from scratch. Ramesh calls strategic workforce planning the project that everyone thinks they want, everyone assumes everyone else is doing, and nobody is really doing. We're just launching a new research project on workforce planning here at RedThread, so I had a lot of questions.

[00:02:49] **Stacia Garr:** Ramesh argues that strategic workforce planning has no end state once you start, and you've changed how the company looks at talent for good. So it's really a lens, not a plan. Near the end, I asked him who should own strategic workforce planning, 'cause this is a hot topic in many of the areas I'm talking about, many of the people I'm talking with.

[00:03:10] **Stacia Garr:** HR, finance, the business, or people analytics? Where does it sit? So coming from a people analytics leader, his answer might surprise you. Again, I'm not gonna tell you what it is. I want you to listen for it. I hope you'll take some things from this conversation you can apply in your own organization, and as always, we're interested to hear what you take from it.

[00:03:31] **Stacia Garr:** Have a good listen, and we'll look forward to hearing from you afterwards

[00:03:42] **Stacia Garr:** Welcome to Workplace Stories. Ramesh, we are really excited to have you with us today.

[00:03:47] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Likewise. I'm looking forward to it.

[00:03:50] **Stacia Garr:** So we are going to talk about a couple of different topics. A lot of times we just kinda go at one topic, but today we've decided to break into two, and we're gonna talk a bit about building HR's data muscle, and then also about strategic workforce planning.

[00:04:05] **Stacia Garr:** But before we get into that, I would love for you to share a little bit about yourself and your work.

[00:04:11] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Yes. About myself, let me start with family. I live in the suburbs of Boston with my wife, two children, my mom, and my dog. And my son is a sophomore majoring in physics, and my daughter is a precocious teenager, so middle school, eighth grade teenager.

[00:04:31] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So I think that sums it up all. My background is interesting, and probably it's not unique anymore because I see a lot of people with these backgrounds click on people analytics for the right reasons. My background is in computer science first. My first life was computer science engineer, engineering background, so did a lot of work in telecom, actually right in this area.

[00:04:55] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Then I wanted to switch careers. My passion was in finance, so I got my MBA from Dartmouth and, uh, went into banking and financial services. So I worked in mostly database, where my journey for people analytics started at Capital One. So then I was actually part of a sales and service strategy team, where my team's sole purpose was to tell a story of how Salesforce incentives are actually working or not.

[00:05:25] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So that's where I really got started in storytelling with data. How do we use insights from data to actually make meaningful changes in employee experience? That led into building a people analytics team at Capital One, and over the years, that's how I made into the people analytics community. Now, if I see a very similar profiles a lot, because if you think about it, people analytics Is, and one is there is a data heaviness about how do we actually, like for people analytics stories.

[00:06:02] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** But more importantly, there is this whole problem-solving engineering mindset. Then there is, uh, numbers connecting to the bottom line, like the finance mindset, right? How does this make an business-- how does this connect to business outcome? Why should they care, right? And then lastly, storytelling, which none of these backgrounds actually prepare for you.

[00:06:24] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** But if you are good in that, then you have the trifecta. A lot of people have the two of the other three, and they get good in the storytelling because of their early career in people analytics. That's how I came into people analytics and, and the reason I have stayed in people analytics. I get impatient very quickly.

[00:06:43] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** If I get bored, then I change. So I got bored with software development, went into finance. I got bored with finance, went into people analytics. But I haven't been bored by people analytics at all, and here's why. The work I do, or the work my team does, it has real impact on people's lives, right? Where we have an ability to change people experiences at work.

[00:07:08] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** People spend most of their waking hours at work, and if the job we do can improve their experience at work even a tiny bit, that's, in my opinion, like success for us, right? So I have been blessed with working in several companies where definitely there are a few examples where I could say, "Yep, we did that."

[00:07:30] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And that's one reason that I'm still in this field.

[00:07:34] **Stacia Garr:** So I love that background and that, uh, sense of impact. It's a lot of why I do this work as well, so it's really good to hear that. For our audience, though, who don't know you as well, we always ask this question, and it's why should we listen to you?

[00:07:50] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** It is my way of paying it forward, right?

[00:07:52] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So when I started this journey in people analytics several years ago, there weren't many established practitioners. But the few that there were paved the way for the community that is today. The collaborative, connected community, which is very generous with its experience. It is because of those pioneers or OGs, I call them, they paved the way for this to happen.

[00:08:17] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** They helped me understand, especially coming from a finance background, an engineering background, I was full of ideas and like, "I can do this, I can do this, I can do this." I'm sure a lot of people who are starting their career right now thinking the same ways, right? But they grounded me. They helped me understand what works and what doesn't work, right?

[00:08:35] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** They gave me the opportunity to learn from their success and their challenges. Now, a decade later, I'm trying to do the same for my fellow people analytics practitioners who are more specifically in the earlier parts of their journey. If I can help someone repeat the success I've had or learn from some of the challenges I faced, I think that feels like a meaningful contribution for me.

[00:08:58] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And many of these were... I always share a couple of things, many of these sessions for people analytics professionals who are in their earlier part of their career, and a lot of times it

resonated with most of them, and they come back years later and be like, "That is something I still keep dear to my heart."

[00:09:16] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And this is not new to me. This is what my OGs told me, and I kind of always follow that, right? Start with the business problem. Don't think of a data, don't think of building a dashboard, don't think of a tool. Start with what are the business outcomes that you're impacting. And if you cannot come up with the answer, then change the problem set because you're not, you're not solving what is really the important thing right now.

[00:09:39] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Then a lot of people also say you build, they come, and it is not the case. So the next part of that is relationship. And then lastly, I said storytelling. And storytelling and relationship are critical because if you come into a room full of HR practitioners with an amazing analysis, groundbreaking stories, and you see people who are glassy-eyed and shaking their heads, then you kind of lost them on day one.

[00:10:11] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** It only creates value when people trust it, understand it, and feel confident that they can use it because you're not the last mile, they are the last mile of that product. So if they don't understand it, how to use it, how to best leverage it for the best business outcome, you're not gonna change anything So I always say start with business outcome, start with relationship, and focus on storytelling.

[00:10:38] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** It's not the statistical mumbo jumbo, it's not grand finale that's gonna make them jump, it's how the journey resonates with them.

[00:10:47] **Stacia Garr:** And I think the extent to which they trust you. Yeah, that's the relationship part of it. So let's jump into stories that we wanted to get into. I think that's a nice lead in.

[00:10:56] **Stacia Garr:** And when we were talking, we were originally talking about you maybe coming to summit this past year, which didn't work out from a timing perspective, but the reason that I wanted to have you come on is you started talking a lot about this relationship, and this idea of how do we enable HR, particularly HR business partners, but HR more broadly, to have the ability to do that last mile, to take the insights that you had, you and your team had, and to do something with it.

[00:11:24] **Stacia Garr:** So talk to us about what were you seeing at that time, and why did you make that capability building a real priority?

[00:11:33] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Yeah. When I came, it was about three years ago, I had a pretty ambitious roadmap, right? So it included a continuous employee listening plan. It included building a trusted source of data, one source of truth, building self-service dashboards, and then eventually predictive prescriptive analytics.

[00:11:52] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Like, I mean, the Burson model, I was like, that's how I thought about my three-year roadmap. But I realized soon that none of that will actually create value unless HR can ask sharper business questions And interpret the evidences and turn the insights that we provide into actions. And so this capability building was not like a separate silo training exercise that I envisioned, but it was more the adoption strategy of the tools and the solutions that we are planning to build.

[00:12:31] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** We didn't stop. We envisioned this journey to be comprising of meaningful intentional learning using dashboards and coursework and projects, influential active community of practice, and then real business projects, right? I remember coming into this role and having an experience. It was that moment where I'm like, "How and when will we all be ready to get into that predictive insights or prescriptive insights?"

[00:13:03] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And the answer was, "We're not there." And if I did anything at that point, we would have built and nobody would have come. So if I didn't build that muscle, or if we didn't plan to build that muscle with the help of our practitioners, then none of this, everything that we planned would have been naught. So the result of our three-year work is showing results, right?

[00:13:27] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** It's showing results in as, like, better storytelling, greater questions. When I say great, more impactful questions to us versus Data, give me the data, right? When we got here, there was a lot of data requests, right? Oh, give me that data, give me this report, give me that data. And a lot of times it didn't sound like we are solving a problem, it sounds like we are filling a non-existing gap.

[00:13:53] **Stacia Garr:** So talk to me, 'cause a lot of times what we hear is, okay, well, people analytics is gonna go help HR leaders understand the data better or understand these things. And it's like, okay, we're gonna give you a

workshop, or we're gonna give you maybe a guide that'll help you with the data definitions or whatever, right?

[00:14:10] **Stacia Garr:** And what you all did was a longer journey than that. It's really kind of, at least as I understand it, learning in the flow of work for HR, the flow of work being how they interact with you all, and you all taking an intentional perspective on that. So can you talk to us a little bit about, like, how did you design for that as the people analytics leader?

[00:14:32] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** From a learning perspective, and learning leaders will actually think about, like, the different levels of learning, like level one, level two, level three. Level one is just scratching the surface and just awareness and satisfied learning. Level two is knowledge, right? Just these metrics, understanding the metrics.

[00:14:49] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** We really wanted something beyond level two, which is true behavior change, adoption, and that can only happen if we build the context into their learning, like why and how it matters to them. And that is why I said I have absolutely nothing about some of the, like, books and guides and, and data definitions.

[00:15:11] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** All of them are table stakes. We have that, right? But those are things that- Not really help sustain the practice from top to bottom. What we really wanted was an evolution, right? Which takes time. And the evolution of thinking, it's a mindset. It's an analytic mindset, right? So that evolution has to happen quite organically, and that can only happen if we build the context into their learning.

[00:15:42] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Like, how does it apply to their day-to-day work? How does this learning actually will help them solve the same problem they solved, like, a year ago in a different way, right? That resonates a lot with them. So to reach that level three, level four, eventually, that behavior change and adoption of the common language was critical.

[00:16:03] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And that kind of changed, again, like I said, it only happens when we build in our context in it. And it also helps them reframe. Like I said, "Oh, I solve this problem differently. How do I reframe this now with a hypothesis-driven approach?" We design, that's why we have a beginner course, which is the level one, level two, which is what is a metric?

[00:16:26] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** How do we come to a metric? Why should we care about the metric? Why does this metric connect to an employee

outcome? That's definitely a starting place, but then more going to the next levels where we actually start to think about how does this current problem that we are solving Should appear differently now that you know the framework of problem-solving with an analytical mindset.

[00:16:48] **Stacia Garr:** So what did that look like, Ramesh? It's, it's good to say in theory, but, like, was this your people analytics leader sitting with these HR leaders? Was this, like, a regular feedback? Like, how did this come to life?

[00:17:01] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So first of all, it started with our HR leadership really saying this is high priority for them.

[00:17:07] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** If upskilling was, like, my priority alone, I wouldn't have this much leverage. But upskilling was an HR leadership priority as well. So that's where it connected very well. It resonated, and I got the resources. But more importantly, it actually showed the HR people what really the leadership priorities were and why.

[00:17:28] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** If I have to think about the way it was stated, every decisions or major people decisions have to have supporting and analytical supporting, like evidences supporting those decisions, right? When you put your vision like that, it naturally conveys to people in HR

[00:17:49] **Stacia Garr:** that

[00:17:50] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** you need to upskill yourself to be able to do that effectively.

[00:17:54] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** It is not could be or should have, it is a must at this point. So that's number one. Number two, we also have a very progressive thinkers in our HR... analytical progressive thinkers who are like, "I know a lot, but I can learn more." They're more like, "Tell us more." They're very hungry for this learning Right?

[00:18:18] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** They were like, "I'm confident with data, but I'm not comfortable with storytelling." Because they're used to a lot of data. We are a very data-savvy company. We use data in everything in our business decisions. So they're comfortable with data, but not comfortable with storytelling, and that's where we come in.

[00:18:36] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So when we build dashboards, the initial trainings that we held was truly to understand, how does this dashboard

or the metric here help a problem that you have? And we use the community of practice effectively to use user stories. We actually brought in practitioners and say, "Hey, how did you use that dashboard?

[00:18:55] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And how did you help show up better with your business leader?" It starts small. It is a slow process, but it sustains because you've built the business context strongly. If it was siloed out training for the sake of training, people will come, they will kind of sign out, and then it's back to like a groundhog day, right?

[00:19:15] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** It's back to that same procedures above. But now it started the leadership, it started the resourcing, clear messaging that this is how we're gonna do things in the future, drives that behavior change slowly and steadily. And then I became a catalyst. Our team became a catalyst in that journey saying, "Hey, we can deliver you very clear, connected training to what you're trying to solve for."

[00:19:40] **Stacia Garr:** And so I've got a whole bunch of questions on that, but I wanna ask another one first, which is, and this came out in our initial conversation, which is you encourage HR partners to start with that question, what are we solving for? And so was that part of that initial push from, or maybe vision setting is probably the better word, from senior leaders around like, okay, whenever we're doing this work, we're gonna start with this, what are we solving for?

[00:20:06] **Stacia Garr:** Or like, when did that come into this overall- Timeline

[00:20:11] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Consistency is key for any big changes, right? In our cases, when we started small, there is always pushback, there is always prioritization questions, why now, why this? So during the early stages, this didn't take an effect, and we were not sure whether the course of direction is the right one, but we persisted, and we had a confidence in our approach.

[00:20:37] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** But the most important part is a successful change also needs champions. I think our cases, as I said before, our leaders were huge support of this journey, and they made it part of their, their overall strategy. So they communicated that to everybody in the team saying, "This is how we will work. Our future of work depends on our ability to tell stories using data."

[00:21:01] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So when that language shows up strongly in all our learning, in every speak, day-to-day speak, it shows the urgency of the leaders and the expectation from leaders in terms of where we should be a year or two, three from then. Then we also started doing a lot of nudges, consistent measured nudges that showed them, "Hey, by the way, are you using it?

[00:21:27] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** By the way, the community of practice." Consistent... Like, we used to have very less participation in community of practice in the beginning, but now we have a full house. And then slowly nudging through our advocates, those people who had, uh, great experiences, using them to tell those stories. So it's a journey.

[00:21:43] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** We've come together in that journey.

[00:21:45] **Stacia Garr:** Okay. And then you've mentioned a couple of times the learning and the training. You've just mentioned nudges and, and resources and all that stuff. And you all made some deliberate choices around what you built versus what you bought. So can you talk to us about what you decided to outsource, what your team owned, and then also, I mean, your team is a people analytics team, it's not a learning team, so did you partner with the learning team to develop this learning internally?

[00:22:13] **Stacia Garr:** How did all of that work?

[00:22:14] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Absolutely. So we knew that there is some aspects of the learning- Done better by the professionals who are experts in that domain, right? And of course, our learning partners are absolutely critical in this journey. So content development is not our forte, right? So, but with the help of our learning partners, we knew how to keep people occupied by the right kind of content.

[00:22:40] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And, and for us, the content was not just about the delivery mechanism, but also the context of the content itself. So that's where we differed. But the aspects where we relied on the experts in this area were like the communication, the storytelling, right? Storytelling is an area we completely relied on experts because that augmented the learning experiences.

[00:23:01] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** The vendor-based training also brought much needed legitimacy to the vision and showed serious commitment from our leadership to say, "This is important for us all. We are investing in you,

and this is critical." People definitely trusted when we built content But when great storytelling vendors came on board and helped us some of the initial level two, early levels of, like, level three kind of learning, it helped set that stage.

[00:23:31] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So when we came back with that context based on them, which is, "Here's what you solved last year, here's what you're solving now, or here's what you're gonna solve next year, how would you use this framework of problem solving?" And then we would coach them throughout the process, too. So we didn't just stop with that content and deliver.

[00:23:50] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** We actually created a regimen where we would actually coach them when they hit roadblocks. We would actually step in and say, "Why did you think that? What was the hypothesis?" And so what... "Is this the right data? Who is your audience? What is the business outcome you are thinking about?" So things like that connected us better with the HR practitioners.

[00:24:10] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Mm-hmm. So those are areas where we knew that an external vendor cannot connect them with them, and then that won't resonate as much with them, like the ones when we do it. But when it comes to storytelling, they've done this for a long time. And as a result, absolutely their expertise is way more and better, and efficiency is great.

[00:24:31] **Stacia Garr:** So if I had to restate what you said, I think what you said was that you pulled in the external vendors who had specific expertise in an area of knowledge, in this example, storytelling. But where you kind of kept the learning/coaching/support local, if you will, or within the organization, is when trying to provide context and connective tissue to the work that actually is within your organization.

[00:24:58] **Stacia Garr:** Is that correct?

[00:24:59] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** That is correct. Yeah.

[00:25:00] **Stacia Garr:** Okay. So then help me understand, how did you structure your organization for this? Because a lot of times I hear from people, analytics leaders, they're like, "Well, that's great, but, like, I don't have the time to go holding their hands and providing the context." They don't ever actually say that, to be clear, but that's the underlying language, right?

[00:25:19] **Stacia Garr:** So how did you structure the team to give them the time and flexibility to do this type of work?

[00:25:25] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** It's funny you ask this. Whenever I share the story in my peer community, that question keeps coming to me, where they keep asking, "Where do you have time to do that? Why is it so important? Do you really see this as a big investment from you?

[00:25:38] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Why would your team do that? What do they gain from it?" And the first and foremost is the efficiency of... So I talked about relationship building, right? What is better in relationship building than sitting with our HR practitioners during this whole entire course of learning and helping them understand that we understand them, right?

[00:26:04] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** That's the biggest thing. We're like, "Oh, we get you." And for them to know we are on our side and we are collaborated, collaborating on this, we are problem-solving it together. It doesn't happen when you just deliver a product or an experience to them. When you sit with them and tell them how you learn certain concept with the context of our company problems, it has a whole difference in the relationship aspects.

[00:26:30] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So for my team, and we have structured the team very similar to most of the People Analytics teams out there, our consultants They have a lot of opportunities to build that relationship, but this is building relationship at scale. So you pretty much talk and work with this big group of people analytics community, HR community, but over time.

[00:26:51] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** This is a three-year time frame. This didn't happen overnight. This didn't happen in a year. We couldn't cram any of this in a year. But it is slow intentional process over a three-year period. But now they know what my team expertise is, who to go for what. It's not one size fits all. There is a clarity in the expectations from them towards people analytics team.

[00:27:14] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** That's huge. I've been in several other companies, and I've been in situations where they can ask for things that shouldn't be asked about us, and we never say no. That is of other people analytics. We never say no to anything that's asked about us. But here, based on the work we did, there is a level of clarity that the practitioner, HR practitioners have about what value we bring to the table.

[00:27:39] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** That's huge. No amount of teaching, guiding, data definitions will help that. This relationship built and the trust that came with it is huge ROI, that huge benefit that I cannot put an ROI number to it.

[00:27:53] **Stacia Garr:** Yeah. You know what strikes me as interesting, and I ask that question, you know, knowing kind of that is the sort of thing that a lot of folks are asking about.

[00:28:00] **Stacia Garr:** But what strikes me is that, you know, you've been on this three-year journey, and there could have been very little that you could have done that would have set you up better for this moment of LLMs and people being able to generate dashboards on their own, being able to pull data, et cetera, et cetera.

[00:28:19] **Stacia Garr:** 'Cause a lot of the work that folks in people analytics have done have been things that, I mean, we all know are getting... AI is getting more capable at doing. But what it's not gonna be as capable at doing is exactly what you just talked about, which is, one, having that trust, that relationship. Two, being able to set the data in context and help folks ask better questions.

[00:28:41] **Stacia Garr:** And three, making sure that the questions and the way we're pointed do point at business results. And so I think that's, for those who are listening and asking themselves the same question I did, which is, "Where in the heck did his team have the time?" I think it gets to that point, which is you're just going to have to offload some of that and make the time, because that is the future of work in people analytics.

[00:29:03] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** It is a zero-sum game. If you're gonna do this, something's gotta give, and then it becomes a prioritization game. If you truly believe that this is one of the most efficient ways of building that trust, understanding their needs, them understanding your way of working Then you gotta do this, and you gotta offload something else that is not a priority.

[00:29:23] **Stacia Garr:** So I have another question that I didn't put in the prep document I think is relevant here, which is, a lot of people analytics folks don't come into people analytics thinking that this is their job or necessarily even having the skillsets themselves to do this. So how did you handle that with your own team to get them prepared to do this work?

[00:29:43] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Yeah. That's interesting. Couple of things. One is we, me and my team, we took some of the trainings ourselves together as a team. Before we did that, we went to a bunch of trainings together, or some of them went to some training, some of them went to a different training. But the whole idea was... And sometimes you're like, "Why do you have to go to that training?

[00:30:04] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** That is what you do."

[00:30:06] **Intro:** But

[00:30:07] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** our way was more, if I have to teach somebody what it is about storytelling, then I need to know what is being taught today out there, the best practices, and that's where we started. I had my whole team in different shapes and form and times and platforms and meetings. We spent time and effort to actually go through some of the training ourselves, and that's where when we created the content, it helped us tremendously to...

[00:30:34] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Like case studies. We created, like, case studies based on our work. So that wouldn't have been possible if we didn't take any of those trainings. So it's sort of for you to... It's sort of like role modeling. You go and take the training yourself, remember that experience, and figure out, put yourself in your HR practitioner shoe.

[00:30:54] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Like, if that training was given, what would have resonated and what wouldn't have? So that helped us curate the content. I mean, we started with hundreds of pages of materials and then tuned it down to, like, 20 to 30 pages. From four-hour to eight-hour training. One day to two day training. We went through so many choices and then finally figured out the best median, optimal path.

[00:31:19] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** We took hundreds of them through test scores over the period of a year, and then some of them to the next level, fewer of them to the other level. The idea is you can't take everybody to every level, but your hope is you teach few people to fish, they're gonna teach the rest of their tribe to do the same so that they can all speak the language.

[00:31:41] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So we kind of took the pyramid approach, starting the base for everybody, one level higher for a few people, another higher few people, with the hope that it's gonna percolate down and it's gonna be made effective for everyone.

[00:31:54] **Stacia Garr:** I have got one question before we go to lightning round, and that is that, as you mentioned, you're in year three now, and you all have actually embedded storytelling into people's priorities for the year as opposed to it being just kind of like this separate thing.

[00:32:09] **Stacia Garr:** So talk to us about why and how that works and why it matters, and are there costs associated with it? Just, I just think this is really different from what we tend to hear.

[00:32:20] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** There is definite cost associated to it.

[00:32:22] **Stacia Garr:** Okay.

[00:32:23] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Uh, but it goes back to our aspiration. We want our HR partners to be effective storytellers who can build narratives, strong narratives for the business leaders using evidences, who can partner with us as collaborators versus asking for data or asking for transaction model.

[00:32:43] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** We wanted a relationship model with our HR partners. So that is our aspiration. That is how we envision our steady state people analytics practice to be. Yeah, we started with giving data, we started with building dashboard, but that's just a means to an end. The real value starts coming when our HR partners are asking, "What are we solving for?"

[00:33:02] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** with their business leaders and coming back to us and saying, "Here is our hypothesis. Help us build the story," right? And then once we have an idea and they're able to give that narration to their leaders, that's the dream state. So that is our aspiration, and this is an investment towards that aspiration.

[00:33:20] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** The cost is, it's high because... This is not a 20% cost. This, this is a goodwill cost. This is the credit cost. Because you are asking HR folks also to make this the top priority, even though it, yes, it came from leaders, so we actually, for leaders, there is a cost to say this is a priority. For HR practitioners, there is a cost to say, "Among all the thousand other things that I have to do," and they have such a busy schedule, "I need to carve out time for this learning.

[00:33:51] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** I do understand this is important for me, but how do I do that?" And they, there is a cost. That cost could erode the trust in us, right? If you send them a path of useless training that doesn't help them anywhere, and they're gonna say, "You know what? You just wasted my time." And so there is a cost of that, and so that is how I think of that.

[00:34:12] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And then more importantly, it's not just learning the content that we are here putting out there, but also building the

courage to try those skills, because they don't know if it'll work for them or not, but they're taking a leap of faith and courage to actually try out new things. Asking, what are we solving for with the business leaders and business...

[00:34:32] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** They've never done that before, and they're now saying, "Here's my hypothesis." Like, trying out all these new things that has an inherent risk in it takes courage, so there is a cost of that.

[00:34:43] **Stacia Garr:** And that's where it comes back to trust, too, right?

[00:34:46] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Exactly.

[00:34:46] **Stacia Garr:** They have to trust not just the data, but the methodology and the approach that you all are encouraging them to use, because it's different from, for many folks, what they've ever done.

[00:34:57] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Absolutely. And lastly, you acknowledging that it is difficult. You acknowledging that it is gonna be hard, but you are with them through, like the coaching thing that I talked about, right? You are in it with them through the journey is another part of reducing that cost.

[00:35:15] **Stacia Garr:** Okay. Well, let's move on to our lightning round so that we can give our folks a little bit of a mental break.

[00:35:21] **Stacia Garr:** We've gone a little long to but it was so interesting, so. So let's start off with the top. First question for you, Ramesh, is what job would you be terrible at?

[00:35:31] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Any job that I have to make decisions without data, I'm really bad at, right? I'm so used to telling people what's the hypothesis, always asking the question, what data do we have to support?

[00:35:44] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So if my job is use your gut, use your intuition, and that's how you're gonna do your job day to day, I will suck at it. I'll be really bad at it, and I'm sure it will be worse than flipping a coin.

[00:35:56] **Stacia Garr:** I feel like this is a real people analytics leader answer. I love it. All right, second question. What is your favorite travel story?

[00:36:04] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Recently... So my daughter, who as I said is a conscious middle-leading, conscious middle-ager, middle-aged, middle

school teenager who's into everything K dash star, right? K-dramas, K-pop, K-cosmetics, K everything. So we made a trip to South Korea this past summer. But what's the interesting that happened during that time was it was not any of that.

[00:36:29] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Actually, she... It was funny because we see a lot of these flashy, like, houses and people going in, like, flashy cars and suits and stuff. That's what we see in a lot of the K-dramas here. But you hit the reality there, right? People are so down to earth. What really resonated with my daughter a lot, the learning, was the respect.

[00:36:52] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** How much they respect their elders is unbelievable, right? We learned a lot of new things, like things about their age. If you're even a year older, you cannot consider them equal. So if you're younger, no matter how, one plus is older, and the amount of respect in their speech and the deference they have is unbelievable.

[00:37:15] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And to strangers, to foreigners, the amount of respect they have. Those things was not a part of what we've seen. So for her, that was all, like, eye-opening. Wow. I never knew this about Korean culture. And so what ended up being a initial reason for going, it's a huge learning for her and for me too, right? A lot of times, like, we think of the inclusion journey, and inclusion starts with respecting other people's opinions.

[00:37:43] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And when I was there as a stranger in a foreign land and asking a lot of borderline stupid questions, nothing was ever pushed away. They were answered with so much gentleness, and for me, that was my learning. And when we came back, she didn't talk about cosmetics or K-dramas or any of that. She talked about the people she met, especially my friends who lived there and their families.

[00:38:08] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** We met all of them and how they interacted with their parents, how they interacted with us These were all like huge lessons for her. And for that reason, I think this is one of the special trips in our list of trips.

[00:38:21] **Stacia Garr:** Yeah, for sure. I think the, particularly as folks, as kids get to a certain age, it can be harder to impart lessons, shall we say.

[00:38:28] **Stacia Garr:** So what a beautiful story of the environment giving both of you lessons. I think that's really cool Okay, final lightning round question is what subject do you wish was taught in every school?

[00:38:41] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** My daughter is gonna be so angry hearing my response. I would say it's personal finance.

[00:38:48] **Stacia Garr:** Personal finance?

[00:38:49] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Yeah, so especially like budgeting and income versus expense, somehow I have a feeling she thinks expense can be greater than income.

[00:39:00] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** It doesn't have to balance. So I think that fiscal responsibility has to grow from a very early age, like live within your mean... Like, don't overextend beyond your means. Understand the implications of income, expenses, how do you prioritize your, your stuff, wants and needs, taxes, compounding of wealth. We started a few things with her, but it needs to start from a very early age.

[00:39:28] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Like compounding wealth is a concept that even a lot of people don't get even today. So, so you don't see 401s not completely utilized in a lot of companies, and that is because they don't understand the compounding of wealth. So for me, having an MBA in finance, I still think, I always think of assets and liabilities, income and expense, right?

[00:39:47] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** I always think along those lines. Now, sometimes I forget other aspects of expense in, especially having a teenage daughter, but they need to get that too. They need to get that, and then when things change, like early markets, like how to read the market. Like it has to start small, but it has to be part of the curriculum so they become better managers of wealth and distribution of wealth.

[00:40:08] **Stacia Garr:** Yeah. Interesting. I agree with you on that one. I, uh, probably drag my children into QuickBooks more than they would care for. All right. So thank you for that, Ramesh. Let's move into the back half of our conversation, and we're gonna talk about something that is really front and center for me right now, which is strategic workforce planning.

[00:40:28] **Stacia Garr:** We're actually just about to launch a new study on this, so I'm really excited about this part of the conversation. So when we chatted before, you called strategic workforce planning the project everyone thinks they want, everyone assumes everyone else is doing, and yet nobody is really doing it, and I think that kind of implies maybe not everyone really wants it.

[00:40:50] **Stacia Garr:** You can correct me if I'm wrong. So why do you see that? What is everyone getting wrong about strategic workforce planning?

[00:40:57] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** I don't think anybody is getting it wrong- Okay ... versus nobody's getting it right because there is no definition of this is what an end state for strategic workforce planning should be.

[00:41:09] **Stacia Garr:** But should there be? I'm gonna push on that. Should there be? 'Cause like, isn't it always evolving?

[00:41:14] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Yeah, it is evolving, but the whole underpinning is- What should be the benefit of doing strategic workforce planning? Yes, for instance, like the basic, like people say, "Oh, you're thinking of future of work, and you're trying to figure out how to get there."

[00:41:29] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** I get that, right? But what nobody really talks about is strategic workforce planning is not a project. It is the way of work itself. It's a way of HR work, the way of business HR connection. It is a change in the way of we doing things today. People don't talk about it. Like, a lot of times it feels like, oh, strategic workforce planning, we have created these processes and this is a playbook.

[00:41:52] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** It's not as simple as that. It's changing the mindset. The paradigm changed a lot, and when you say strategic workforce planning, it mean... can mean any number of things to any number of people. It can mean so many different things depending on the industry they are in and the industry evolution they're expecting.

[00:42:08] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So for me, that is the fundamental challenge is when everybody thinks about strategic workforce planning, they think there is an start and an end to it. And in my opinion, there is no end to it. It's not like, "Oh, I've done strategic workforce planning. I'm done." If you start that, that's how it's going to be.

[00:42:25] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So there is no going back to Before strategic workforce plan, you're now fundamentally shifting the way you're looking at talent, and that is something that I'm trying to grapple with, right? So if, as an organization, you've never thought through... And I'm talking not just HR, the whole company, you've never thought about planning a talent life cycle in that sense, where do you start?

[00:42:54] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** That is this. And the second, uh, the third thing, I started with second, the, so third thing is who owns it? Ownership are critical. Somehow some people think it should be HR, some think it's should be driven by businesses, and HR is an important partner in that. Some think it should be a separate function by itself, and HR, business, and all of the teams come and play together.

[00:43:16] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Again, I'm not saying it's, there's one-size-fits-all answer for that. But what should be the algorithm that dictates if these conditions exist, this is how it should work. Again, I'm a confused person when it comes to that. I'm looking for answers, and every time I speak to someone who say they're doing it, I get c- even confused more.

[00:43:36] **Intro:** Oh,

[00:43:36] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** really? That is what your definition is? Oh, that is what you're trying to get to? But fundamentally, what I've understood so far is when we think of the talent of the future, what decisions that we need to make today that will make sure that we get there in the timeframe that we tell ourselves to? But once we get there, the cycle repeats itself.

[00:43:58] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** This is not, as like I said, it doesn't end, it's just a way of doing things at all completely.

[00:44:06] **Stacia Garr:** Okay. So let's put some definitions on this. I know that y- I would agree with you that there's no standard definition, but in Ramesh's world, in your... Maybe if it's your dream world, how would you define strategic workforce planning?

[00:44:20] **Stacia Garr:** Like, what is it?

[00:44:22] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** In my dream world, a strategic workforce planning dictates How a company should attract, develop, and retain talent. And when I say dictate, it should say what roles should we even have? Again, and now we are thinking of the AI-driven world. So what roles should exist for you to deliver on your strategy promise?

[00:44:46] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** How do you attract that role, top talent, right? And how do you develop, upskill, and cross-skill that talent so it becomes relevant and continues to be aligned? And how do you retain that top

talent, and how do you now understand anything that doesn't fit in these three? How does it then get built into the AI world?

[00:45:06] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So how do you balance these that optimizes the just-in-time talent, that optimizes employee experience, and that optimizes your investment between human and AI?

[00:45:18] **Stacia Garr:** So I'm just about to hit publish on a new report that is, uh, what we're calling the HR Framework, and we've got this whole section in that report that is work and people strategy.

[00:45:28] **Stacia Garr:** And so in that report, we divide out some of these different concepts that you just mentioned. We talk about work design, so what's the work that has to get done to achieve the business outcomes that we want? And then the next element is skills and tasks, so what are the tasks that do that work, and what are the skills that are needed from the people to do that work?

[00:45:46] **Stacia Garr:** And intermingled in there, truly, is who or what does it? And then from there it is strategic workforce planning, but workforce planning identified as the determination of what resources we need to enable that work to get done. From there, we talk about org design. How do we structure an organization to do that?

[00:46:06] **Stacia Garr:** And then after that, we talk about talent strategy, which is what I would put a lot of... Some of the things you just mentioned, so how do we attract talent? How do we develop it? How do we make sure that we have the skills and all the rest of that? So that's kinda how I'm thinking about it. I think it's really interesting that you're kind of pairing what, in my mental model, is workforce planning and talent strategy really close together.

[00:46:28] **Stacia Garr:** So one, what do you think about my approach? I'm still gonna publish the paper, but I'd love your thoughts. And two, like, how are you thinking about some of those other elements that really go into this?

[00:46:39] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** I love your approach because what I didn't tell you was the design of what we call a future of work And in some people, when I talk to some of the practitioners, for them, it's kind of swappable.

[00:46:52] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** There's a future work and strategic work planning, they feel the same thing. And I don't agree with that. And for me, that's why what you just said resonated, and that's how I was thinking, right? Which is the way we work or the way we have designed our roles are not

sustainable. We are even, and not just current, but if you look at pretty much most people's roles, right?

[00:47:15] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Except if they're in a pure technical role where they exactly know what they're supposed to do and they have a skill set to do that. Most people do the role that has nothing to do with the job description they got hired into. The skill set they have to the skill set they were originally thought they should have almost no connection.

[00:47:32] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** This is all the legacy jobs that we have built over time. So now if I think about it, what do we really need? And that's the business outcome. How do we drive the business outcome? What tasks will help us optimize that business outcome? And to do those tasks, you need a very specific skill set. And how do we then connect skill set to task to job, which will then dictate who we are looking for.

[00:47:57] **Stacia Garr:** And what skills they should have.

[00:47:59] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** What skills they should have, because the skills they have is gonna be absolutely day one skill need for the job they're gonna do. And this is where the whole upskilling, cross-skilling comes in too, right? If you can't attract that talent with that skill set, what are you gonna do?

[00:48:14] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And that is looking not now Three years from now, if you need that talent and you can't find the talent three years from now, how do you plan and adapt now? How do you understand what are the adjacency skills for those? How do you actually build the right kind of training or whatever you need to get people, the right kind of people, ready for that change or talent need of the future?

[00:48:37] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And that is why I think what you just said resonated a lot. It's not just looking at people and JDs of today for how our current TA pipeline works, current talent management pipeline works. None of that, right? L&D, like all of that are connected. SWP, if you're not talking about learning and development as a part of SWP, then you're missing a big piece.

[00:49:00] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** If you're not talking about OD as a part of SWP, you're missing a big piece. So it's very hard to define SWP as a single entity like that, but the crux of is what you just said.

[00:49:11] **Stacia Garr:** Yeah, no, it's interesting how intermingled these concepts are, and not necessarily historically, but as we look to creating the organizations we're all talking about trying to create, which, you know, leverage AI to do the things AI should do and uses the humans to do the things they do best.

[00:49:26] **Stacia Garr:** You know, it's really kind of an interesting... It will require a different meshing of capabilities than what we've done before, and thus a different combination of people doing that work and activities and all the rest of that. I want to make sure that we get to, though, what you've done as opposed to, uh, waxing lyrically on all this stuff.

[00:49:46] **Stacia Garr:** So you all are really kind of building from zero. So there wasn't really a lot of workforce planning at MassMutual, aside from places like call centers and stuff. So talk to us a little bit about where did you start, and how have you gone about defining where you're trying to go, knowing that there's not an end state?

[00:50:07] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Yeah. I mean, like you said, there's already certain levels of workforce planning happening in the company. But I wouldn't say we have clearly laid a destination state or, like, really clarified What you're solving for. What we know is there is gonna be a big change in the way we think about everything we talked about, podium, jobs, architecture, like the decision tree on build, buy, borrow, AI.

[00:50:41] **Stacia Garr:** Bot is the fourth B I'm hearing.

[00:50:43] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Yeah, yeah, bot. Yeah. Build, buy, borrow, bot. Yeah, exactly. I think you talked about the four Bs, right? Uh-

[00:50:48] **Stacia Garr:** Probably, yeah.

[00:50:50] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So build, buy, borrow, bots, and then there's this whole supply and demand of labor, and this whole understanding the tasks and skills connection. So all of these things, they're not serial efforts, they're not parallel efforts, but there is some give and take between all of them.

[00:51:08] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So for a company of size, it's a monumental effort. So it's a huge effort, but the biggest obstacle of this project is not the technical aspects of it or the execution of it, it's the change management. It's because you are not just managing change within HR, you're managing change across the entire company.

[00:51:25] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So you have to establish that the use case is... That this is the right use case, and you have to get the business leaders to understand that there will be a big disruption in the way they actually look at talent, the way performance management work, the way the talent acquisition, every aspect of the employee lifecycle will look different under the new regimen.

[00:51:49] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** But it'll take... It's a long tail process, so they won't see an impact in 12 months. Like, "Oh, you promised all of these things. Where is it?" Right? It won't happen. But building that trust and faith to say, "Give us, uh, several years," and paint that picture of the future, and to show why this investment is important now.

[00:52:08] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So that change management at every level is gonna be important because people are going to get anxious like, "Oh, you have a bot strategy? What does that mean? Am I all going to lose... Like, are we all gonna lose our job?" No, that's not the point. I recently read this case study that I thought was beautiful, and I thought this resonated a lot with me.

[00:52:26] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Not case study, like a real example. Ikea apparently had these 4 or 5,000 people whose jobs were AI or botted, whether it was through robotics or a combination of everything else. But what they did was they actually created a whole new specialty, interior designing, which is a big part of their strategy going forward.

[00:52:50] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And they upskill these people, and now they don't have to go to market to hire these people. They have the people who know the business, who understands the nitty-gritty details of what goes in materials, costs, et cetera. But now they're offering a service that didn't exist before. And there are not many companies that has this whole vertical alignment, selling, designing, like all of that.

[00:53:15] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So I thought this is where serious forward-thinking, like visionaries, right? They're like, "Yeah, why would I remove all these people from their roles and then hire the same number of people for my strategy to work?" These are the people who have drank the Kool-Aid, and these are the people who know my business, and I trust them.

[00:53:34] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So why do I go and get rid of all of them to hire another 5,000 of them to do something I've never done before?

[00:53:40] **Stacia Garr:** Yeah. So I love that story. I will offer, though, from some folks I know who, uh, were around it, I'm not gonna say who or what or... And I am gonna say, I'm gonna caveat everything I'm about to say with this was told to me by somebody else, and I didn't know it myself.

[00:53:57] **Stacia Garr:** But one thing I heard from folks was that part of the reason they did that was because it is a company based in the EU, and they couldn't just eliminate those jobs, so they had to think creatively about it. And so what I think is interesting here, though, is where that intersection is between putting in a constraint, whether it is legal or it is leadership driven, we are going to not do these things, and instead we're gonna do these things.

[00:54:25] **Stacia Garr:** Like, any organization could do that, could say, "Look, we just aren't gonna eliminate people because we're able to AI-ify their jobs. We're not going to just eliminate people's jobs. We're actually going to find another place that is strategically beneficial for them." And I think that's a leadership choice, and I want to under- underscore that you have to have leaders who will make that choice, but there's also a role for people analytics to say, "Here's somewhere where we could use them."

[00:54:51] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** I think we talked about the adjacency skills and all of that a while ago, right? I completely agree, like, the EU constraint, but what the underpinnings for me were is they thought creatively of using their people in the, the whole skills thing coming in the picture, training them into an area that they never hired before.

[00:55:09] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So I don't think they have experience hiring interior designers before. So that was where I was like, hey, when you think of bots and when you think of these, it's going to make people more productive, and a lot of the question is, so what do you do with the rest of the work, like, time? It's not like people are not gonna do anything.

[00:55:28] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And this is the example where it comes to think of future needs, think of the future of work, and, and figure out how you use this optimization to bring people to skills that could and will be used for the company in the near term.

[00:55:44] **Stacia Garr:** It's a different way of thinking about the benefit, right- Correct ... of the AI.

[00:55:48] **Stacia Garr:** Yeah. Okay, I know that we are getting very short on time, so I do wanna ask you one more question about workforce planning, and

then we'll kinda go into our wrap-up. And that is, you mentioned all sorts of folks in an organization are involved in strategic workforce planning, and yet often there's a lot of debate about where the ownership should be.

[00:56:10] **Stacia Garr:** So in your mind, why should it be with people analytics or HR versus with our friends in finance or somewhere else?

[00:56:17] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** This is my passion-based answer. Strategic workforce planning impacts employee experience positively, but it impacts people experience. So that naturally makes HR as the right group to manage that change.

[00:56:34] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Maybe it's about change management, we talked about it. So who can manage that change very well? The group that has consistently managed change about people is HR. So HR naturally. Now, is people analytics the right team? I don't know, because we are a catalyst, we are a cog in the wheel, but we are not quite the runners of the program.

[00:56:57] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** We have not traditionally been great program managers. This is a program that's gonna live forever, and so there needs to be a certain discipline because people analytics folks are problem solvers. They want to solve everything right now. But this needs Little more patience in thinking through stepwise change over the long period of time.

[00:57:23] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And in my opinion, you need a second discipline. And definitely analytic experience is critical. I see a high-- Like, just like how 15 years ago we thought, "Who are, who is this, this unicorn of a best people analytics professional?" And they talked about consulting, storytelling, and technical skills. In a similar way, there is a trifecta for strategic workforce planning person as well.

[00:57:49] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Sort of project planner, change manager, and analytical thinker. That's how I'd see it. They have to think about this analytically because to some extent there is a numbers behind it, and there needs to be certain investment, there needs to be certain ROI, there is needs to be certain outcome. But it is a project base.

[00:58:06] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** It needs to have certain start and end because it's a continuum, so they need to manage. And it has to be managed as a program, so they need to manage the change, understand the stakeholders, bring them together, share the journey. That's not a people analytics muscle in my

opinion. We do some things well for a short duration when we deliver a project, when we deliver a product, when we deliver an analysis.

[00:58:28] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** But people analytics team are not equipped to do this for continuum, like a, a this long-term focus with that skill set. There could be time where people analytics will evolve to do that with just AI and all of that, so we don't have to do many of the things I talked about. AI can take over. Agents can do many of this program management and change management, all of that stuff your agents can do.

[00:58:52] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And so people analytics can do that because the analytical skill set they have, and problem-solving they have, modeling they have, all of that is there. But today, I think it should be in HR, but it should have people who are disciplined in program change management, project management, and analytical thinking, problem-solving.

[00:59:13] **Stacia Garr:** Okay. Interesting. We are at the end of our time, so I wanna wrap us up with just a couple questions. And the first one is, I know we went in kinda two different areas today, but if our listeners had one key takeaway from your experience, what would you want it to be?

[00:59:31] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So relationship. That is my key takeaway because people analytics is foreign to non-people analytics people It's never gonna be a muscle people will normally have in any other function.

[00:59:46] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So before you look data, before you look at anything else, know what your customers are facing, right? Put yourself in their shoes, understand their problem, understand what they're trying to solve for, and that can only happen if you build that relationship. So the most important thing I'll tell them is build that relationship.

[01:00:05] **Stacia Garr:** And then the final question, Ramesh, is what we call the purpose question. We ask every single guest, and that is, why do you do the work that you do?

[01:00:13] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** I think we started with that earlier. For me, the impact. It's everything I do has some sort of people experience impact. For most people who spend most amount of their waking hours in the world, this means a big impact, right?

[01:00:32] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** So whether I understand their voices and share their most important concern, or understand who has a great day and

who doesn't, and what drives a great day and what drives a bad day, who can be great managers so we have a lot of them, how can we train the best of them for the future? This has real people impact, and for me, that is important.

[01:00:53] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** And sometimes people ask me, "Why is that important? Numbers are important. Finance is important. Like you, that's how companies work." For me, company is about talent, and talent is people. People impact is gonna be critical, and that's why I like my job.

[01:01:08] **Stacia Garr:** Ramesh, thank you so much for joining us on Workplace Stories.

[01:01:11] **Ramesh Karpagavinayagam:** Lovely having this conversation. Thanks for having me.

[01:01:14] **Stacia Garr:** Absolutely.

[01:01:20] **Intro:** Okay. That's a wrap for this episode of Workplace Stories. If you like what you heard, please subscribe to our podcasts so that you can be the first to know about future episodes. For exclusive access to our research, insights, and a vibrant network of human capital leaders, consider joining the RedThread Research community.

[01:01:38] **Intro:** Visit RedThreadResearch.com to learn more and to take your workplace to the next level.