WHAT IS PEOPLE OPERATIONS

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Defining People Ops

People Operations. You may have heard the term before, but what does it really mean, and why are so many people talking about it?

People Operations (People Ops, or POPS) is a people-centric business approach that emphasizes workforce empowerment to drive growth. With a focus on automating traditional HR processes, POPS shifts attention from tactical administrative work to people and productivity.
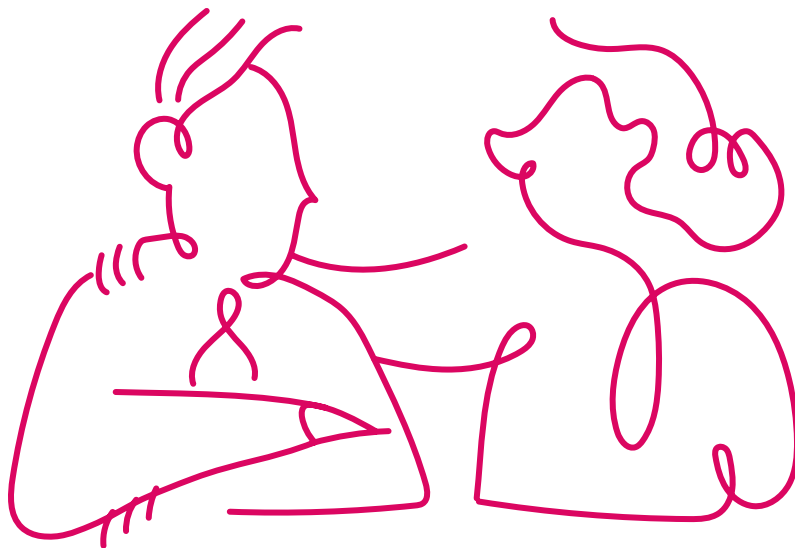
People

Operation

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People Ops is a simply a combination of two key components:

People - /ˈpēpəl / (n.) are beings that have certain capacities or attributes such as reason, morality, consciousness, or self-consciousness, and being a part of a culturally established form of social relations such as kinship, ownership of property, or legal responsibility.

Operations - /ˌäpəˈrāSH(ə)ns / (n.) - is everything that happens collectively within a company to keep it running and earning money. It incorporates the systems, methodologies, people, processes, and technologies needed to make the organization function.

These are the two most critical components of any business. People are the most valuable asset, opportunity, and expense. Operations are how the company delivers on its very purpose and reason for being. Combined, "People Operations" makes magic. It is one of the most important business functions.

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People Ops Manifesto

No paper. No forms. No filings.

People Ops lives in a digital-must world.

No spreadsheets. No manual tasks.

People Ops embraces automation.

No authoritarianism. No politics. No hassle.

People Ops empowers people to do their best work.

No guesswork. No anecdotes.

People Ops surfaces data and insight.

No fluff. No waste. No BS.

People Ops is driven by outcomes.

No busywork. No inefficiency.

People Ops drives productivity.

Less paperwork, more peoplework.

This is People Ops.

First, a little history...

People Operations as a term can trace its origin back to Google, circa 2006.

Notably, this was when Laszlo Bock first started working in HR at Google. Allegedly, the tech giant put the term "People Operations" on his offer letter to which Laslzo balked. He was coming from a seasoned career in Human Resources and wasn't immediately impressed by — or in agreement with — ditching the HR title. But Google was firm on the term. According to Google, engineers regarded "HR" as "administrative and bureaucratic," whereas the term "operations" implied "a credible title, connoting some actual ability to get things done."

The company preferred the term "People Operations" because it somehow gave greater power to HR leaders out of the gates.

The term was ahead of its time. It was "Google-speak for Human Resources," according to a 2016 NPR story that featured Laszlo.

Fast forward nine years, and it would seem Laslzo had a complete about-turn on the phrase, becoming a full supporter of People Operations. In fact, the SVP of People Operations at Google would go on to write Work Rules!, a seminal work on People Operations its inextricable links to business growth and strong leadership. The book put the phrase People Operations in the mainstream, with experts such as Daniel Coyle, author of The Talent Code, lauding it as a book that "should be given to every leader, every entrepreneur, every manager, every student, and every human being who wants to understand how to build a successful, cohesive, high-performing workplace."

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Needless to say the term People Operations — or in recent years, "People Ops" or "POPS" — stuck.

Now in 2021 People Operations job titles are growing 10 x faster than Human Resource jobs on LinkedIn, and entire technologies are being built to support the function.

There's little doubt at this point that the term and approach are here to stay. So the next question is how to bring People Operations approaches into your small or medium sized business.

" **We spend more time working than doing anything else in life. It's not right that the experience of work should be so demotivating and dehumanizing.**

LASZLO BOCK

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Bringing People Operations into your company
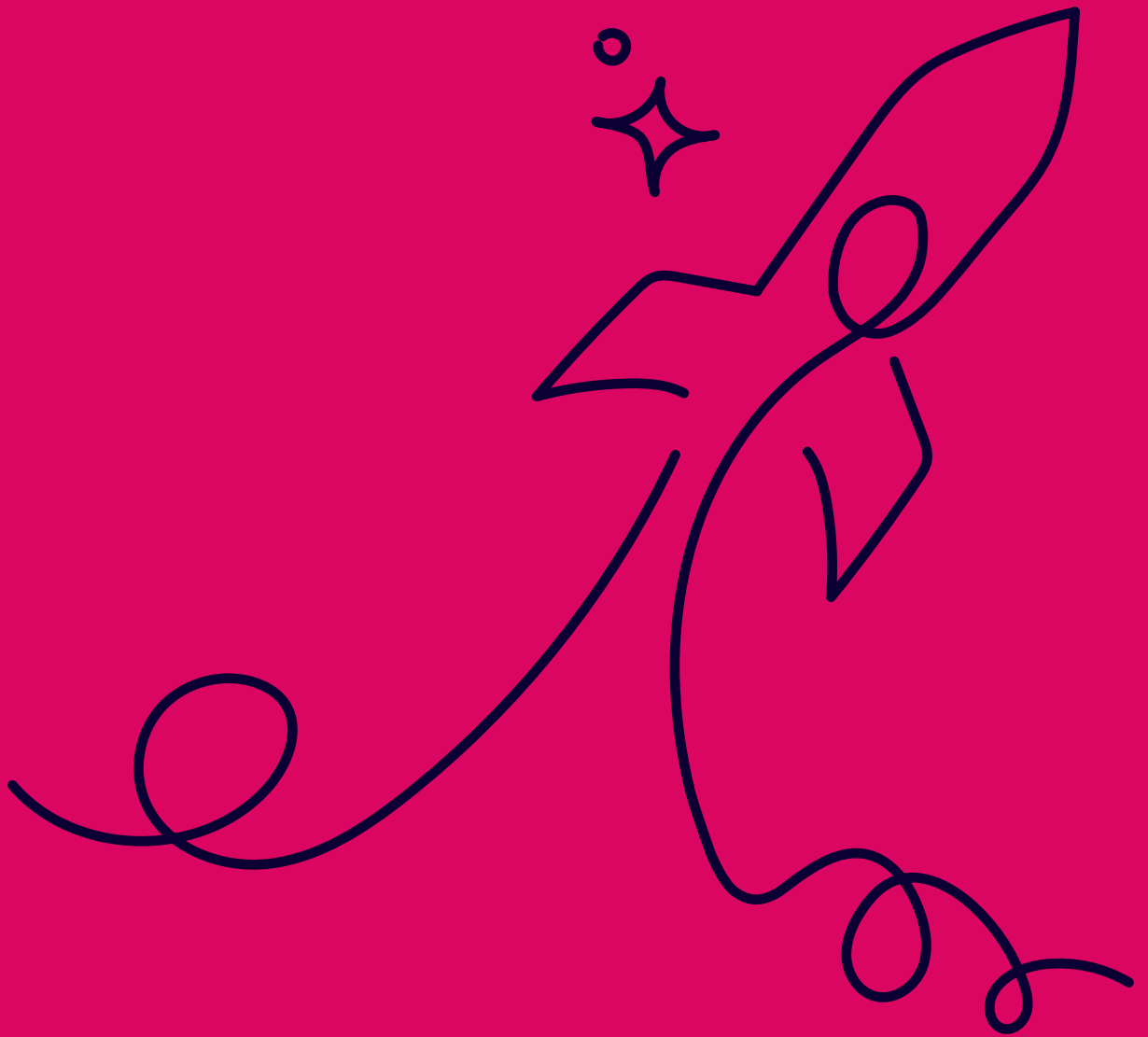
Putting people and operations at the heart of your HR and small business is not as esoteric as you might think. In fact, be the competitive edge your company needs to stay in front of the pack.

Why? We can likely agree that at every company, people are one of — if not the — greatest asset to a business. We can probably agree, too, that smaller companies often know their employees on more personal levels. Smaller companies understand individual strengths and weaknesses professionally, and often know details about individuals' lives that impact their work and focus. These connections lend themselves to an improved ability for employers to tap into authentic employee motivators in work, which in turn drives loyalty, resilience, and productivity in teams.

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63.3%

of companies say retaining employees is harder than hiring them.

This also ends up manifesting as a competitive advantage over larger companies in talent wars. Small companies know their people, and treat them with as much respect and trust as friends would. To keep this advantage, small businesses would likely gravitate towards a "people operations" approach over HR anyday.

Thus, POPS has evolved to become today's better answer to HR. It puts people back into the center of an organization which builds productivity and profit.

STEP 1:

Assess Your Current State

A small POPS approach is part efficiency, part intimacy. It scales back and reverse-engineers what was developed for larger companies. They have big tech? Small businesses have mobile, integrated, affordable, small tech that's just as smart, and lets you shine where you already shine: in adaptability and your personal knowledge of your work, customers, and employees.

It's useful to assess where you and your business stand in terms of your POPS-ready tools and processes. You can assess yourself on the 5-level People Ops Maturity Model to see where your company stands.

The People Ops Maturity Model measures the extent to which an organization's People Operations are driven by established and documented best practices, processes, standards and metrics proven to drive business outcomes. It's based on an amalgamation of TriNet's work with more than 30,000 small and midsize businesses and helps companies develop and refine their people programs.

Use the model to:

- ✓ Create strategies proven to drive business alignment and success
- ✓ Enable companies to self-diagnose and assess their current state
- ✓ Assess the gaps between your current and desired future states
- ✓ Provide a roadmap for achieving world-class people operations
- ✓ Develop and refine people operations priorities over time

PEOPLE OPERATIONS MATURITY MODEL

LEVEL 2: REACTIVE

STRATEGY

Reactive to people and HR programs and issues. Primarily focused on time & payroll. *An emerging company.*

TECHNOLOGY

Primarily spreadsheets and digital documents. Inadequate HR resources and tooling. Limited security & employee self-service.

RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES

Compliance and data exposure from errors & deficiencies. Inability to focus on the business. Limited visibility into basic metrics and compliance. Hidden costs & missed savings.

LEVEL 4: SCALING

STRATEGY

All core processes automated. Focusing on workforce collaboration, engagement, and productivity. *A great company: employer of choice.*

TECHNOLOGY

Single digital platform to manage all HR, benefits, and people needs. Strong mobility, self-service and unified reporting. Proactive compliance guardrails.

RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunity costs from workforce productivity, engagement, and talent gaps. Scaling talent recruiting and retention efforts.

HR ADMINISTRATION   build   **PEOPLE OPERATIONS**

start   grow

LEVEL 1: CHAOTIC

STRATEGY

Ad hoc. Only deal with people and HR issues when they happen. *Getting started.*

TECHNOLOGY

Manual, paper-based processes. Lack of HR resources, knowledge, and tools. Limited data and mobility.

RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES

Major compliance & data (PII) exposure from audit deficiency, fines and errors. Inability to scale the business. Time wasted on paperwork. Hidden costs.

LEVEL 3: LIMITED

STRATEGY

Automating core HR, benefits, and compliance processes. Starting to focus on people and culture. *A good company.*

TECHNOLOGY

Semi-automated processes with moderate use of the cloud. Often disparate technology, workflows, & reporting silos. Semi-digital employee experience.

RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES

Lost profits and revenue from hidden costs. Inability to focus on people, productivity, and culture. Moderate compliance exposure from disparate systems and errors.

LEVEL 5: MASTERY

STRATEGY

Repeatable best-in-class processes, benchmarked and validated with industry peers. *Elite company: 'best place to work'.*

TECHNOLOGY

Single digital platform for the entire "fluid workforce." Complete mobility for workers. Predictive people analytics, insights, and recommendations.

RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES

Higher level challenges and opportunities: employee motivation and wellbeing; operationalizing diversity, equality, and inclusion; maximizing employee collaboration & productivity.

STEP 2:

Invest in the Right Technology

A true POPS approach involves embracing technology more comprehensively than you may have done in the past, with efficiency, productivity, and profitability as an end goal. In some industries like tech of information sciences, this idea is second nature. But if you're a coffee roaster or a home builder, leading with technology may feel like the opposite of a people-centric goal. It isn't.

Whether you're drawn to technology or not, the foundational goal of this massive first step is: Make the stuff you have to do easy — and hands off.

HR automation is the use of computers and technology to perform human resources work with minimal human assistance. Small businesses may feel at a disadvantage here; the most integrated tools (human resources information systems, or HRIS), were once only available at high costs and required special skills to use. But in the last few years, a proliferation of Software as a Service (SaaS) companies have made technology solutions more affordable and ubiquitous. Now, there are robust, scalable technology solutions for businesses (and budgets) of all sizes, and most are surprisingly easy to use.

So a critical step is to acquire a People Operations platform and begin transitioning to it immediately.

What this gets you:

✓ **Information stored in the cloud** - The cloud refers to any product or service delivered via the internet. When something is stored in the cloud, it can be accessed anywhere, anytime, eliminating the risk of data loss tied to a physical ledger, computer, or geographic location.

✓ **All-in-one integration** - A comprehensive POPS system puts HR, payroll, benefits administration, performance management, time tracking, and more, in the same place. No more systems that don't play well together. Basic employee data is integrated with secure storage of sensitive documents, team and performance data, and has the ability to store different (and legally required) levels of data for gig workers and contractors.

✓ **Security** - The nature of your business may or may not be top-secret, but people data, from social security numbers to sensitive health information to signatures, is sensitive, and keeping it secure is a legal obligation for employers. A secure system keeps data safe, and provides different levels of access, from administrators to managers to users.

✓ **Mobility** - A good POPS platform offers a mobile component. This provides immediate and intuitive access to POPS systems. Mobile became even more important as remote work (and COVID quarantines) pushed employers and employees into different spaces. You can even use mobile technology to track employee time tracking and locations.

✓ **Self-serviced HR** - When you have an easy-to-use People Platform, employees can access personal and company information on their own time, and perform common tasks on their own. This saves you time and costs. It also makes employees feel empowered to manage their own sensitive data.

✓ **Additional features** - POPS systems vary, but in addition to the critical features above, some also give you tools that non-integrated platforms don't have, such as employee engagement surveys, HR analytics and reporting, and integrations with other productivity apps like G-suite, Slack, or Quickbooks.

STEP 3:

Outsource the Tedious Stuff to Technology

The reason you've invested in technology is so that it can do most of the tedious tasks of HR for you.

- ✓ Managing employee documents
- ✓ Staying in compliance
- ✓ Ensuring your systems are accurate across various areas: payroll, benefits, etc
- ✓ Running payroll
- ✓ Filing taxes
- ✓ And more

REQUEST THAT A REAL HUMAN WALKS YOU THROUGH THE PRODUCT IN A ZOOM MEETING & WHERE YOU CAN ASK LIVE QUESTIONS

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STEP 4:

Build a Great Employee Experience

Once you invest in technology and implement your systems, your HR tasks will be running without any work required by you. What that gives you back is: time. And with time you can start focusing on the best part of People Ops — the people!

Building a great employee experience improves your employee retention, increases productivity, and increases innovation and collaboration between teams.

This is similar to, but distinct from, building company culture. While building culture refers to setting core values and conduct within a company, building a great employee experience means looking at individual workers and teams and building systems that work with their unique needs When you can build human management systems that take individual needs into account at scale, you're truly maximizing your investment in people.

Here are some ways to start thinking about how to operationalize the people part of People Operations:

✓ Brush up on theories of authentic human motivation. Especially if you are a one-person POPS department, lean on POPS experts that consult for small business. They already understand established models for optimizing motivation, including what workers in different generations want. Are the workers you're trying to attract and retain concerned with company culture? Fair pay? Benefits? Autonomy? Mastery? Education? Purpose? Recognition? Online communities that come with gold-star POPS platforms can also provide a sounding board for your questions. People ops are not the same across all industries, but you'll soon get a feel for which factors are universal.

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✓ Figure out your own peoples' independent motivators, and build systems (incentives, pay, rewards and recognition, etc) around them. This means talking to employees and managers. Open communication involves truly listening, as well as providing transparency. Empowering employees to learn, to safely air grievances and reconcile situations, recognizing their accomplishment and growth, and helping provide for their wellbeing, all build a strong organizational culture. Don't risk losing your top performers because you didn't factor in what makes them perform.

✓ Build motivation into cascading goal frameworks that pay off larger company goals. Cascading goals — like V2MOMs, OKRs, or BHAGS — are a great way to align disparate team goals to larger business objectives without losing sight of the more entry level professionals and their needs.

✓ Connect employee work to the greater purpose of the business. Through cascading goals, performance alignment, manager and employee one on one conversations, and host of other techniques you should aim to remind your employees how their individual work is helping to achieve the broader vision of the company. This will cement feelings of purpose and belonging in your organization.

STEPS 5:

Measuring The Impact of People Operations

People analytics is the process of collecting and analyzing data across the employee lifecycle for the purpose of improving an organization's overall workplace performance. This process is also sometimes called people analytics, workforce analytics, or talent analytics.

Identifying which metrics to track is the first step in building an effective, data-driven people operations team. It's not enough to simply know what was happening. You also need to know why, and — in a highly optimized workplace — what could happen next.

To do this, People teams must develop a comprehensive measurement and reporting strategy, one that coexists with the entire business.

Some of the core components to people analytics include:

✓ Operational reporting: a collection of basic historical data used to identify and reflect on what has happened in the past. An example of this would be a headcount or turnover report.

✓ Advanced reporting: more sophisticated reports, usually including additional data sources, that surfaces trends that directly impact decision making. Examples include employee engagement and wellbeing scores.

✓ Strategic analytics: statistical analysis and modeling of reports to proactively identify business opportunities and vulnerabilities. Examples include diversity scoring and its impact on the business, detailed employee turnover analysis, and benefits benchmarking.

✓ Predictive insights: prediction of future outcomes and scenarios based on strategic analytics, data models and scenario planning - empowering decision makers with actionable insights for rapid, data-driven decisions. Examples include projected salary costs, and forecasted retention rates and costs.
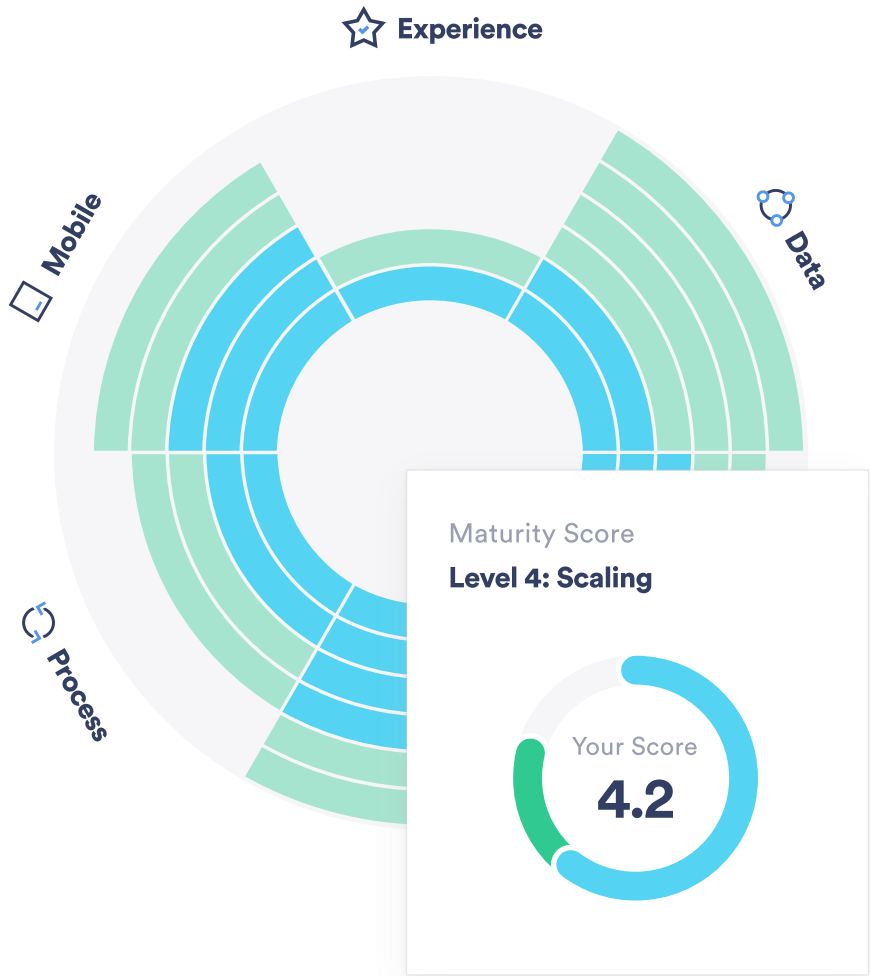
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How to track your progress

A good way to organize the levels of sophistication of people analytics is to align them to the People Operations Maturity Model.

Here are some examples of the types of metrics tracked at each stage of maturity.

⭐ **Experience**

Mobile

Data

Process

Maturity Score
Level 4: Scaling

Your Score
4.2

LEVEL 1: CHAOTIC

At this level, you're likely tracking things manually. Data needs to be created from manual sources, dug up from original sources such
as your employees, or exported from various systems. It takes minutes, if not hours, and insights are pretty basic. Executives, managers and employees typically need to come to you in order to get the information.

Common metrics at this stage include:

✓ Headcount

✓ Salary

✓ Turnover

✓ Absence

✓ Time off

✓ Hiring costs

✓ Training expenses

LEVEL 2: REACTIVE

At this level, you've digitized some basic processes and have a better understanding of your workforce. This provides quicker access to some basic metrics and the ability to drill down into more specifics. Some information still needs to be pulled from manual sources and a lot of spreadsheets are involved. It still takes minutes - and sometimes hours - to complete most queries.

Common metrics at level 2 include:

✓ Headcount trends (insights by type, location, department, location)

✓ Compensation breakdown

✓ Overtime expenses

✓ PTO accrual and liability

✓ Voluntary & involuntary turnover rates

✓ Time off details

✓ Workforce expense details

✓ Time to hire

LEVEL 3: MODERATE

At level 3, you've digitized the majority of your processes and have access to more data. Challenges center around aggregating and reconciling data across sources and systems—and keeping it all in sync. You have line of sight into core workforce trends and things like time, pay and benefits. You can access most of these in seconds from a dashboard on your computer or smartphone. Everything is updated in real time. More sophisticated analysis like trends reports and comparisons takes more time and effort. At this point, you're starting to surface more valuable business insights.

Common metrics at this level include:

✓ Workforce insights (starts, exits, promotions)

✓ Tax, wage & labor distribution

✓ Turnover causes & costs

✓ Benefits utilization trends

✓ Benefits cost breakdown

✓ Speed to open enrollment

✓ Time to productivity

✓ Ability to slice, dice and drill down

LEVEL 4: SCALING

At this level, core processes are completely digitized and integrated. You no longer have to spend time aggregated and integrated data sources. For the most part, you have one view of the truth at your fingertips from a variety of purpose built dashboards. This frees you and your team up to focus on more strategic people analytics—things like the employee experience, engagement, and wellbeing. You're also starting to run trends and do benchmarking to see you're doing versus peers and market comparables. These insights are valuable to your executive peers and all people managers.

Common metrics here include:

- ✓ Fluid workforce composition trends
  (full time vs. part time vs contingent)

- ✓ Compensation changes & trends

- ✓ Employee engagement

- ✓ Performance alignment

- ✓ Salary benchmarking

- ✓ Benefits benchmarking

- ✓ Diversity & inclusion breakdown

LEVEL 5: MASTERY

Finally, at level 5, you're getting predictive. You're leveraging trends and benchmarks to identify business risks and opportunities. You're able to model future scenarios, anticipate challenges, and surface insights to decision makers. Data is accessible on demand in seconds—often being pushed to you proactively in the form of alerts, nudges, and scheduled reports and analytics. When you're making a job offer, it tells you it might not be accepted because the salary is lower than the market rate for that position. You can predict lower turnover rates due to recent changes in your benefits offering. You're turning insights into a competitive advantage.

Common metrics here include:

- ✓ Employee wellbeing

- ✓ Team wellbeing and burnout

- ✓ Employee engagement details

- ✓ Workforce productivity

- ✓ Forecasted retention rates

- ✓ Potential employee flight risks

- ✓ Diversity, equality and inclusion benchmarks

- ✓ Peer cost benchmarks

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Are you ready?

Readiness to change business strategy is part attitude, part knowledge. But there is very little risk to diving in. You've already started.

Remember: Your best case scenario is to acquire a POPS platform and begin transitioning to it immediately.

Can't do that? Here are some smaller things you can do today to move towards POPS adoption and people-based nirvana:

1. **Figure out where you are on the POPS maturity model.**

2. **Move towards cloud and automated tools.** If you're using ledgers and paper, any software is better than none. While you don't ever want to put secure or confidential information into an unsecure (read: free) cloud platform, some of the free tools out there let you store things like letter templates, and less critical employee data such as lunch preferences or shirt sizes. As you begin trying to understand motivation and culture for your own people, you can use free online forms to create surveys and cloud spreadsheets.

3. **Keep learning.** Check out our People Operations and HR resource center.

About TriNet

TriNet (NYSE: TNET) provides small and medium size businesses (SMBs) with full-service HR solutions tailored by industry. To free SMBs from HR complexities, TriNet offers access to human capital expertise, benefits, risk mitigation and compliance, payroll and real-time technology. From Main Street to Wall Street, TriNet empowers SMBs to focus on what matters most—growing their business.

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