SAMPLE

Building Tomorrow's HR Leaders

The People Function as an Executive Discipline

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INTRODUCTION

This is the tenth volume of the Building Tomorrow's People series, and it takes up the profession that runs every other profession's context: the people function -- the leaders who hold the organization's talent, performance, culture, and employee experience as their domain, in an era that has transformed both the work and the workforce faster than any previous decade. The series has treated the individuals (the AI engineers, the coaches, the CEOs, the founders, the executives); this volume treats the professionals whose job is the organization's people themselves -- the HR leaders -- and the machine era has made their profession the company's most contested ground: the function that must re-skill the workforce the automation is reshaping, redesign the organization the flattening is restructuring, hold the culture the hybrid era is dissolving, and do it all while carrying the profession's oldest burden (the credibility problem -- the seat at the table the people function has been fighting for since before the era began, and the suspicion that the function is either the executive team's enforcer or the employees' advocate, and cannot be both).

The book's position, stated at the start: the people function is not the personnel department of the previous century, and the HR leader is not the compliance officer with a nicer title. The function is an executive domain -- the organization's people systems, run with the same rigor the finance function runs the money -- and the profession's practitioners are leaders of a discipline with its own anatomy, its own instruments, and its own operating calendar. The chapters take the discipline apart deliberately: Chapter 1 defines the people function and its modern anatomy; Chapter 2 treats the people strategy -- the organization's workforce as a designed system; Chapter 3 treats the talent engine -- acquisition, onboarding, and the appointment discipline at the organizational scale; Chapter 4 treats the development system -- learning, careers, and the leadership bench; Chapter 5 treats performance and rewards -- the systems that allocate the organization's money and its meaning; Chapter 6 treats culture and employee experience -- the designed environment the function holds; Chapter 7 treats the people data -- the analytics, the instruments, and the ethics of measuring humans; Chapter 8 treats the labor and the law -- the function's legal and relational layer, from compliance to the workforce's collective voice; Chapter 9 treats the HR leader's own standing -- the credibility discipline, the business partnership, and the board relationship; Chapter 10 treats the operating discipline -- the people function's calendar, audit, and future.

Every chapter follows the structure the series has used throughout: the anatomy of the discipline, its failure modes, its instruments, and the practice the practitioner can run -- closing with an argument and a checklist, because the series' readers are practitioners, and practitioners read to act. The book's standing promise is the series' own: no dated references, no product names, no fabricated statistics -- the disciplines are the durable parts, and they are what remain when the tools change.

CHAPTER 1: THE PEOPLE FUNCTION

1.1 What the function is

Every organization above a certain size grows a function the org chart draws and the culture caricatures: the people function -- the leaders and systems that hold the organization's talent, performance, rewards, culture, and employee experience as their domain. The caricatures are the chapter's first subject, because they are the profession's starting condition: the function as the paperwork department (the personnel administration of the previous century -- the forms, the filings, the compliance, the payroll's custodianship: real work, and none of it the profession's reason to exist), and the function as the social committee (the engagement's entertainment, the perks, the parties: the culture's consumer rather than its designer). The caricatures persist because they describe the function many organizations actually run, and the honest definition has to be built against them: the people function is the organization's people systems, held as an executive domain -- the talent's acquisition and development, the performance's assessment and reward, the culture's design and maintenance, the organization's structure and health -- run with the same rigor, evidence, and accountability the finance function runs the money, because the people are the organization's largest investment and its only competitive asset, and the function that holds them deserves the same standing as the function that holds the capital.

The function's definition has an era version worth stating immediately, because the machine era has made the definition true in a way the previous decades only asserted: the workforce is now the scarcest resource in most industries (the capital is abundant, the technology is rentable, and the people who can do the work are the constraint), which has converted the people function from the cost's administrator to the strategy's instrument -- the function that determines whether the organization can actually have the workforce its strategy assumes, at the cost its economics require, in the culture its strategy needs. The function that runs the people systems well is the organization's real competitive advantage, and the function that runs them badly is the organization's real constraint, whatever the strategy document says -- and the profession's practitioners are the leaders who run them deliberately rather than administer their symptoms.

1.2 The function's anatomy

The people function's anatomy, held as the chapter's summary and the book's map: the domain has six systems, each with its own discipline. The first is the talent system: the organization's people acquired, onboarded, and retained -- the acquisition's craft, the entry's experience, the exit's handling, and the whole pipeline the Chapter 3 treatment builds. The second is the development system: the workforce's growth -- the learning, the career paths, the leadership bench, and the succession (Chapter 4). The third is the performance system: the work's assessment -- the goals, the reviews, the calibration, and the consequences, run at the organizational scale (Chapter 5). The fourth is the rewards system: the money and the meaning -- the compensation architecture, the benefits, the recognition, and the honesty of the whole deal between the organization and its people (Chapter 5's second half). The fifth is the culture system: the environment's design -- the values made behavioral, the experience's

moments, the listening's instruments, and the drift's correction (Chapter 6). The sixth is the organization system: the structure itself -- the org design, the workforce planning, the skills' architecture, and the design's continuous fit to the strategy (Chapter 2). The six systems are the function's domain, and the practitioner who can name them, assess them, and run their cadence has begun the operating discipline the whole book builds toward.

The anatomy's honest scope deserves a boundary at the start: the people function holds the systems, not the people's outcomes alone -- the leaders hold the outcomes (the executives of the series' earlier volume), and the function holds the systems that make the leaders' outcomes possible (the talent they hire, the assessments they run, the rewards they allocate, the culture they work inside). The boundary's failure modes run both ways: the function that owns the leaders' outcomes (the HR team that takes responsibility for the manager's engagement, the executive's retention, the culture's condition) has confused the systems with the outcomes and will be blamed for the leaders' failures -- the scapegoat's version of the function; and the leaders who own none of the people's outcomes (the delegation of everything human to the function) have confused the function for the leadership, and their organizations run the culture by the HR calendar rather than by the managers' conduct. The practice runs the boundary honestly: the function builds the systems, the leaders run them, the outcomes belong to both -- and the practitioner's craft is the partnership that holds the boundary without dissolving it.

1.3 The credibility problem

The profession's oldest burden deserves its own section at the start rather than the end, because it is the function's real history and the practitioner's daily context: the credibility problem -- the people function's long-standing status as the organization's second-tier function: the cost center's inhabitants, the executives' assistants, the policies' enforcers, the seat at the table the function has been fighting for since before the era began. The problem's honest anatomy is worth stating, because the folklore's version (the executives do not value the people) is half the story at most: the function earned the second-tier status in the decades it ran the second-tier work (the administration, the compliance, the social committee -- the caricatures' content, and real work), and the era's function has inherited the status along with the domain. The status's costs are structural: the under-resourced function (the systems starved while the strategy demands them), the excluded function (the decisions made without the people's evidence), and the discredited function (the function's counsel discounted in advance, whatever its quality) -- and the costs compound, because the function that is not trusted is the function that is not consulted, and the function that is not consulted is the function that has no practice, and the function that has no practice has earned the status it began with.

The credibility problem's resolution is the book's running thread, and its honest form is not the public-relations campaign (the function's rebranding -- personnel to human resources to people operations, each name fighting the previous name's status) but the practitioner's discipline: the credibility earned the way every profession's is -- through the work's quality, the counsel's evidence, and the results' delivery. The people leader who runs the domain like an executive (the strategy stated, the systems built, the metrics held, the counsel argued with the business's own numbers) accumulates the standing the rebranding promised and the title cannot confer, and the people leader who runs the function like the caricature (the

policies administered, the engagement entertained, the counsel delivered in the function's own vocabulary) confirms the status whatever the name on the door. The resolution's era note: the machine era has handed the function its credibility case in the era's own terms (the workforce's scarcity, the skills' obsolescence, the culture's dissolution -- all business problems with people-systems solutions), and the practitioners who can argue the case in the executive team's numbers are the profession's standing's real resolution, one practice at a time.

1.4 The machine era's function

The function's definition and its problem stated, the era's effect deserves the chapter's deliberate treatment, because the people function is the era's most transformed domain: the automation of the function's own operations (the routine HR work -- the transactions, the filings, the coordination -- now absorbed by the tools, exactly as the executive layer's routine products were absorbed), the transformation of the workforce it serves (the skills' half-life shortening, the roles' redefinition, the re-skilling demand the function must meet at the scale no previous function has), and the instrumentation of the people themselves (the analytics, the listening systems, the continuous measurement of the workforce's state -- the instruments with the power and the ethics the Chapter 7 treatment holds). The era's function is simultaneously more automatable (the operations), more strategic (the workforce's scarcity), and more accountable (the measurement's power) than any previous version -- and the practitioner's honest position is the same fork the series has offered every profession: the function's routine products are absorbed, the function's judgment products are elevated, and the practitioner who locates themselves against the fork deliberately is the leader the era's function actually needs.

The era's second effect runs through the workforce itself, and it is the function's real demand: the organization's people are now the ones being reshaped (the roles automated and recreated, the skills demanded and obsolete in the same decade, the career paths dissolved and rebuilt around the skills rather than the ladders), and the function is the organization's only system for managing the reshaping at scale -- the re-skilling's designers, the transition's stewards, the workforce's honest planners. The function that meets the demand is the strategy's actual partner (the organization that can have the workforce it needs, when it needs it), and the function that misses the demand is the organization's actual bottleneck (the strategy's assumptions about the people quietly wrong, the workforce's gap discovered at the execution), and the era's HR leader is the practitioner who runs the meeting of the demand as their domain -- the talent engine, the development system, and the workforce's plan, run deliberately, at the scale, with the discipline this book assembles.

1.5 The practitioner's profile

The chapter's last section holds the practitioner's own profile, because the profession's readers deserve the honest mirror at the start: the people leader's actual work is the domain's running -- the systems' architecture, the cadence's discipline, the counsel's evidence, and the partnership's craft -- and the profile the work demands is specific: the executive's judgment (the people decisions as the business decisions they are: the tradeoffs argued, the evidence weighed, the consequences owned), the operator's rigor (the systems

run with the processes' discipline: the transactions correct, the calendar held, the compliance absolute -- because the function's administrative excellence is the credibility's floor, not its ceiling), and the profession's own character (the fairness held when the fairness costs, the confidentiality kept when the confidence is expensive, the truth carried when the truth is unwelcome -- the character the Chapter 9 treatment builds into the function's standing, and the one the profession's stereotypes have always tested hardest). The practitioner who runs the profile deliberately is the function the caricatures cannot describe, and the chapters that follow build the profile's instruments: the domain's systems (Chapters 2 through 6), the domain's data and its ethics (Chapters 7 and 8), and the practitioner's own standing and calendar (Chapters 9 and 10).

The function's own organization

The anatomy's systems run through an organization of their own -- the people function's team: the talent's specialists, the development's designers, the operations' administrators, the analytics' practitioners -- and the function's own structure deserves the anatomy's first deliberate treatment, because the function's organization is the systems' delivery mechanism and the profession's most commonly inherited default. The function's structural questions: the center and the edge (the functional work's split -- the central expertise (the design, the policy, the architecture) held by the function's core, and the delivery (the leaders' partnership, the local service) held at the business's edge: the shared-services and business-partner structures the profession has debated for decades, and the honest resolution is the work's logic: the design centralized (the systems designed once, with the expertise's concentration), the delivery partnered (the leaders served where the leaders work), and the split audited against the actual service rather than the structure's tradition -- because the center that designs what the edge cannot deliver and the edge that delivers what the center never designed are the same failure at two locations); the function's own size (the team's capacity held against the organization's demand -- the function that is under-resourced is the systems' quiet starvation (the strategy's people demands arriving at the team that cannot run them), and the function's honest business case is the capacity's argument: the ratio held against the work, stated in the Chapter 2 economics, and the function that has never made the case is the function the budget has decided about without); and the function's own talent (the team's people acquired and developed by the same disciplines the function runs for the organization -- the Chapter 3 appointment protocol at the function's own hiring, the Chapter 4 development at the team's own growth -- because the function's own people practices are the organization's preview: the talent the function attracts, the development it provides, and the culture it runs are the demonstration the organization reads before it believes the counsel, and the function that runs its own house well has the proof that the teaching transfers.)

The function's history and its inheritance

The function's definition and its problem run through a history worth knowing, because the inheritance explains the defaults the practitioner must examine: the people function's three eras. The first era was the personnel administration (the function's origin: the records, the payroll, the compliance -- the workforce as the cost to be administered, and the function as the paperwork's custodian; the era's artifacts still in the function's inbox (the filing's descendants, the form's culture, the policy's reflex), and the caricature's content is the first

era's accurate portrait); the second era was the human resources' professionalization (the function's first standing fight: the personnel renamed the resources, the systems built (the assessment's cycles, the compensation's bands, the development's programs), and the seat's claim argued (the function as the management's partner -- the claim that won the title and lost the standing, because the partnership was asserted more often than demonstrated, and the resources' vocabulary -- the people as the assets to be optimized -- carried the first era's cost-center's logic under the second era's strategic's clothing); and the third era is the one this book treats: the people function as the executive domain -- the workforce as the scarcest resource and the function as the systems' executive, run on the evidence, argued in the economics, and held to the ethics -- and the era's practitioners are the function's third generation: the inheritors of both the first era's administrative excellence (kept deliberately: the floor is real) and the second era's standing's fight (won honestly this time: the demonstration rather than the assertion), and the practitioner who does not know the history is the practitioner who repeats it -- the default's comfort (the paperwork's function, the social's committee) wearing the third era's title.)

The function's stakeholders

The function's anatomy has a map the practitioner should hold deliberately: the stakeholders -- the parties the people function actually serves, and the honest ledger of their claims. The stakeholders' honest list: the organization itself (the owner's interest: the workforce's performance, the cost's discipline, the risk's containment -- the function's fiduciary duty, held in the economics of Chapter 2 and the counsel's honesty of Chapter 7); the leaders (the partnership's claim: the systems that make their leadership possible, the counsel that makes their decisions better -- the Chapter 9 partnership's service, held to the expertise's line rather than the order's execution); the workforce (the people's claim: the fair deal, the safe workplace, the honest process -- the Chapter 5 and Chapter 8 disciplines, and the function's duty to the people the systems hold); the law's society (the public's claim: the compliance's floor, the labor's standards, the community's obligations -- the Chapter 8 custodianship, held absolutely); and the profession itself (the discipline's claim: the standards' maintenance, the ethics' advancement -- the practitioner's own Chapter 9 character, held as the function's long-term credit). The ledger's craft is the claims' honest arbitration: the stakeholders' interests genuinely diverge (the cost's discipline against the deal's generosity, the organization's flexibility against the workforce's stability, the leader's request against the person's right), and the function's daily work is the arbitration run on the stated principles -- the systems' integrity (the fair process the Chapter 9 advisor held), the law's floor (the non-negotiable), and the whole book's candor (the tradeoffs named rather than disguised) -- because the function that pretends the claims align has built the arbitrage's politics into its own calendar, and the stakeholders who watch the function serve the strongest claim quietly learn the ledger's real weights, whatever the values statement says.

The stakeholder ledger's era note: the transparency's era has made the ledger public -- the workforce's experience told on the review platforms, the culture's account shared by the alumni, the function's conduct visible to the market's talent (the employer's story of Chapter 3 held at the ledger's mercy) -- and the arbitration the practitioner believed was private is now the organization's public record, which converts the ledger's honesty from the ethics' nicety to the brand's economics: the function that arbitrates the claims with the stated principles has the public record the story corroborates; the one that arbitrates by the power's

convenience has the record the market displays, and the display is the acquisition's and the retention's standing headwind, permanently.

The profession's own funnel

The function's anatomy has one last honest element the practitioner should name at the start, because it shapes every chapter that follows: the people function lives inside its own funnel -- the same information-smoothing the executive volume described, running on the function's own picture of the organization it serves. The function's funnel has two flows: the upward (the workforce's voice arriving through the leaders' layers -- the engagement the managers have shaped, the culture the middle has smoothed, and the function's analytics built on the data the funnel has already curated), and the downward (the leadership's intent arriving at the function through the executives' summaries -- the strategy's people implications understood through the meeting's shorthand, the change's real reasons filtered through the political's caution). The funnel's consequence is the function's specific blindness: the people function, the organization's designated listener, can be the last to hear the organization's truth -- the engagement's decline visible in the market's signals before the survey's scores, the culture's failure told by the alumni before the listening surfaces it, and the practitioner's craft is the countermeasure: the raw channels held personally (the Chapter 6 listening's bypass disciplines run by the function's own leader -- the verbatims read, the exit conversations taken, the front lines visited at the cadence), and the downward's verification (the strategy's people implications checked against the executives' own stated reasoning rather than the meeting's shorthand -- the Chapter 3 executive volume's probes, run by the function's counsel at the strategy's table). The function that treats its own picture as the truth has inherited the whole organization's funnel with the analytics' authority, and the practitioner who runs the countermeasures is the one the counsel's honesty actually stands on.

The shared services' craft

The function's own organization has a layer the modern structure demands and the craft's treatment: the shared services -- the people operations' central engine (the transactions, the records, the administration's systems) -- and the layer deserves the section because it is the function's floor and its era's transformation: the operations' automation (the routine work -- the transactions' processing, the records' maintenance, the requests' handling -- now the tools' absorption target, and the automation's discipline is the boundary's design: the processes standardized before the automation (the tool's efficiency applied to the standard's clarity -- the automation of the mess is the mess at the machine's speed), the exceptions' redesign (the work that resists the standard examined: the genuine exception held human, the process's failure redesigned away), and the automation's yield reinvested (the hours freed -- the Chapter 1 era's fork at the operations' grain: the freed capacity moved up the value's stack (the partnership's hours, the analytics' craft, the counsel's depth) rather than the headcount's arithmetic (the function's shrinkage as the automation's report card) -- because the automation's real return is the function's transformation: the operations' engine run lean and the professional's judgment given the hours the transactions used to consume); the service's quality's discipline (the operations run as the service it is -- the turnaround's honesty (the service-level's reality stated and held: the request's cycle the workforce can rely on), the error's economics (the transaction's mistake priced honestly: the payroll's error is

the credibility's cost the Chapter 9 floor named, and the operations' error rate is the function's most self-inflicted exposure), and the workforce's experience of the function's own service (the systems' usability -- the request's route, the portal's clarity, the answer's speed: the function's service design as the culture's demonstration, because the workforce's daily experience of the people function is the operations' interface, and the function that runs the operations brilliantly has the floor the whole book's counsel stands on.)

The Closing Argument

The people function is an executive domain: the organization's people systems -- talent, development, performance, rewards, culture, and structure -- held with the same rigor the finance function holds the money, because the people are the organization's scarcest resource and the era's only durable advantage. The caricatures (the paperwork department, the social committee) describe the function's history, and the credibility problem is the status the history earned; the resolution is the practitioner's discipline, not the function's rebranding: the work's quality, the counsel's evidence, and the results' delivery. The machine era has made the function's definition true and its demand urgent -- the operations automated, the workforce reshaped, the measurement powerful -- and the practitioner's fork is the series' standing one: the routine products absorbed, the judgment products elevated, and the location against the fork chosen deliberately. The practitioner's profile is executive judgment, operational rigor, and professional character, and the chapters that follow build its instruments.

Checklist for Chapter 1

- Write your function's six systems in your own words: talent, development, performance, rewards, culture, structure. Which one have you been running by default rather than by design?
- State the boundary honestly: which people outcomes belong to your leaders, and which systems belong to you? Where has the confusion cost you the blame or the exclusion?
- Audit your function's credibility case: what work have you delivered this year that an executive team would price in the business's own numbers?
- Locate your function against the era's fork: which of your routine operations could the tools absorb today, and what remains when they do?
- Name the era's demand on your workforce honestly: which skills are obsoleting, which are emerging, and who in your organization owns the reshaping?
- Check your profile's three legs: where has your judgment been executive, your rigor operational, and your character tested -- and which leg is weakest?

CHAPTER 2: THE PEOPLE STRATEGY

2.1 The workforce as a designed system

The people function's first strategic discipline is the workforce plan: the organization's people held as a designed system -- the numbers, the skills, the structure, and the cost, deliberately arranged to serve the strategy rather than accumulated to follow the hiring -- and the discipline is the chapter's first subject because its absence is the function's most common strategic failure: the workforce that just happened. The organization's people profile (the headcount's shape, the skills' distribution, the seniority's mix, the cost's structure) is the accumulated result of years of individual hiring decisions, each sensible at its moment, and the profile that has never been designed is running the organization's strategy whether the strategy knows it or not -- the skills the strategy needs absent at the concentrations the work requires, the layers the strategy flattened still present in the payroll's shape, and the cost the strategy assumed quietly wrong in the budget's largest line. The people strategy's discipline is the profile's deliberate design: the workforce the strategy actually needs, stated in the numbers the organization plans with, and built through the function's systems rather than through the default's accumulation.

The workforce plan's instruments: the demand's honest model (the strategy's translation into the people it requires -- the roles, the skills, the numbers, the timing: the strategy read at the workforce's grain, and the translation is the function's strategic work, because the strategy that has never been translated into the people it needs is a document, and the translation's errors are the execution's constraints); the supply's honest inventory (the workforce the organization actually has -- the skills' actual distribution, the roles' actual occupants, the pipeline's actual state: the inventory the analytics of Chapter 7 makes continuous, and the gap between the demand and the supply is the people strategy's real subject); and the plan's three routes (the gap closed by building (the development system's work: the current workforce grown into the needed skills), buying (the talent engine's work: the market's people acquired at the market's prices), or borrowing (the contingent's craft: the contractors, the partners, the temporary arrangements -- and the plan's honest route mix, because the workforce strategies that assume one route (the always-hire, the never-hire, the always-train) are the ideologies rather than the plans, and the plan's route mix is the organization's real people economics).

2.2 The skills-based organization

The people strategy's era-form deserves its own section because it is the era's real organizational change: the skills-based organization -- the workforce arranged around the capabilities the work actually requires rather than the roles the hierarchy has historically described -- and the shift deserves the function's deliberate treatment because it is both the era's opportunity (the talent's flexibility: the people deployed to the work rather than to the boxes, the skills found where the titles hide them, the internal mobility the role-based org makes structurally impossible) and the era's demand (the skills' obsolescence: the roles' half-life shortening faster than the org chart's refresh, the workforce's re-skilling as the organization's standing requirement, and the skills' architecture -- the inventory, the

taxonomy, the mapping -- as the people function's new operating spine). The skills-based organization's disciplines: the architecture's honesty (the skills' taxonomy built on the work's actual requirements -- the capability the role demands, stated at the grain the hiring, the development, and the deployment can use, and the taxonomy that has never been built deliberately is the job-description folklore's inheritance, running the organization's talent systems on the vocabulary of the previous century); the architecture's use (the skills running through every system the function holds: the acquisition's requirements drawn from the taxonomy, the development's targets mapped to it, the deployment's matches made against it -- because the architecture that exists only as a document is the org-design fashion, and the architecture that runs the systems is the organization's actual change); and the architecture's maintenance (the skills' state kept current -- the obsoletions flagged, the emergences added, the workforce's actual capabilities refreshed at the cadence -- because the taxonomy that is two years stale is the organization planning its workforce in the previous era's vocabulary, and the staleness is invisible until the strategy needs the skills the taxonomy no longer names).

2.3 The organization's design

The people strategy includes the structure itself: the organization's design -- the reporting, the spans, the layers, the teams' shapes -- and the design discipline is the function's shared work with the executive layer, because the structure is the strategy's skeleton and the function's own instrument. The design's principles, held briefly here and treated at the executive's scale in the series' earlier volume: the design follows the strategy (the structure drawn from the work the strategy requires -- the seams of the organization placed where the work's flows need them, not where the politics grew them), the spans and layers held deliberately (the executive layer's thickness audited: the layers that only translate are the era's automation candidates, and the spans that are too thin are the bottleneck's structural form), and the design's total cost held (the structure's arithmetic: the layers' cost, the coordination's cost, the distance's cost -- the numbers the function should own, because the organization's largest structural decisions are people decisions, and the function that cannot price a restructure is not in the restructure's room).

The design's era note: the machine era's flattening (the middle layers' translation work automated, the coordination carried by the tools, the structure's information costs collapsed) has made the design's questions continuous rather than episodic -- the structure that was redrawn annually is now adjusted in the operating rhythm, and the function's design discipline has become the standing partnership with the executives: the design's evidence (the spans, the seams, the costs) monitored continuously, the adjustments made deliberately, and the reorganization's discipline (the transition's honesty, the leaders' treatment, the reasons stated truly) held to the standards the executive volume set -- because the people function is the organization's design's steward, whatever the org chart's authorship says.

2.4 The people economics

The people strategy's last discipline is its economics: the workforce's cost, held as the organization's largest investment and planned with the investment's rigor -- the people's full cost (the compensation, the benefits, the facilities, the development, the function's own

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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