Empowering HR Teams to Become AI-Savvy Talent Leaders

A Once in a Generation Opportunity

Agentic AI is triggering the most exciting and profound innovations in the history of human resources since the strategic business practice was founded in the early 20th century. This artificial intelligence (AI) movement is unfolding so fast that we sponsored a Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey of C-suite executives and others involved in their organization's use of AI and asked them about their plans for adopting these technologies in the near future.

The following report finds that 64% of respondents agree that the pressure to create value using AI in their industries has never been greater. Moreover, 61% agree that their C-suite is making AI a priority. At the same time, decision makers are looking to AI to raise productivity and drive revenue growth.

However, enterprises will require having the right workforces that are capable of capitalizing on the benefits of AI. Our experiences working with Fortune 500 companies have revealed that AI investments will not meet expectations without the right talent and technologies—and the right collaboration, implementation, and change management plans—in place.

Just as critical, the HR department's leadership is required to ensure the success of company-wide AI initiatives. The C-suite will need to collaborate more closely to navigate these issues and effectively execute the organization's top-down AI strategy—including agentic AI—which typically includes deploying AI-native HR and talent platforms to help them modernize their workforce.

We hope this Harvard Business Review Analytic Services report inspires you as you embark on your AI journey. It will help you understand the opinions of your peers who are working quickly to establish comprehensive AI strategies to increase productivity, create new competitive advantages, and drive growth.

Ashutosh Garg
Cofounder and CoCEO
Eightfold AI

Empowering HR Teams to Become AI-Savvy Talent Leaders

Organizations everywhere are preparing for the ways that artificial intelligence (AI) will transform their businesses, from increasing productivity to improving decision making to enhancing product development. The technology's profound effects mean there's an imperative for executives and boards to adopt AI and find ways to implement it effectively across their organizations.

MANY COMPANIES recognize the importance of these developments. In a February 2025 survey by Harvard Business Review Analytic Services of 371 respondents, all of whose organizations are using or considering using AI, 64% agree that in their industry, the pressure to create value using AI has never been greater. In addition, 61% agree their C-suite is prioritizing the technology.

A seismic shift is on the horizon when it comes to talent strategy, too, not just in what skills workers need but also in the flexibility organizations require in how they use their workforces. Executives will have to ensure their employees have the skills, capabilities, and mindsets necessary to support their AI strategies. For HR, that remit means there is

now strategic urgency to understanding how well current roles, teams, and talent align with long-term AI goals. Given how widely the technology lets executives reimagine organizational operations, having the right mix of future-focused people and skills will remain paramount.

These kinds of dynamics are no surprise to Andy Valenzuela, executive vice president, global rewards, employee success strategy and operations, at San Francisco–based tech company Salesforce Inc. His view is that AI is already changing everything about jobs, skills, and workplace strategies, calling for fresh thinking about hiring, career paths, and team structures, as well as the data-crunching tools needed to support them.

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It's notable, then, that the survey finds many organizations currently lack the workforces they'll need to capitalize on AI. While 91% of respondents agree that having the right talent to support an AI strategy is critical to their organization's success, 72% also agree that focusing on AI has revealed technical skills gaps within their organization's talent base.

Taken together, these findings suggest that HR teams have a key opportunity to take the lead in securing the talent who will drive their organizations' AI strategies forward. By knowing how various roles contribute to and make use of the technology, HR can more flexibly source and hire the best people to fill them. By understanding—and staying current on—which skills translate to business success, the function can improve talent pipelines. By reskilling and upskilling current employees, including considering which workers may be more effective in other roles, HR can help the company adopt less rigid mindsets about jobs and team structures. And by showing they have the expertise to contribute strategic workforce insights, HR leaders can become trusted advisers to senior decision makers on pressing AI talent matters.

This report will explore how HR executives are increasing the value of their function with regard to organizational talent strategies. It will cover the AI-related challenges HR faces, the steps the function is taking to reset perceptions of its abilities, how HR teams are pursuing new approaches to skills and staffing, how AI is enhancing HR's own processes and workflows, and the profile of an AI- and data-savvy HR professional today.

Obstacles and Challenges

The growing emphasis on AI means HR has a chance to become companies' go-to source for critical relevant expertise in surfacing and sourcing the right AI-ready talent. Yet often the function isn't seen as a core part of AI efforts. The survey finds, for example, that among respondents whose organizations have some degree of AI strategy, only 21% say HR leadership is closely involved in decisions about their organization's AI strategy, with another 30% saying it's moderately involved. About half (49%) say HR leadership is a little or not involved.

The latter finding may have more to do with overall perceptions about HR. The survey shows there are several challenges preventing the function from wielding more influence. Chief among them, mentioned by 52% of respondents, is that HR lacks AI expertise/skills. The next most common challenges are HR lacks a leadership role who can drive AI efforts (32%), AI decision makers don't seek HR's input about AI matters (32%), and HR lacks a strategy to source AI talent (29%). Overall, these answers suggest that AI simply isn't seen as the function's domain. FIGURE 1

A few other factors play a role, as well. Understanding what's most important to executives, for example, may seem an obvious goal for any function, but in complex global organizations with competing demands, it's not always so simple. "Sometimes HR can have brilliant ideas, but they're not always connected to what the business is trying to do, so they have a hard time landing," explains Jenn Galbraith, vice president, employee success product management, at Salesforce. "Leaders are feeling the pressure to make sure their teams are staffed and make sure they have the right capabilities on hand." For AI efforts, in particular, HR teams risk seeming out of touch if they can't demonstrate knowledge of the organization's priorities. "HR needs to ensure that, as they deploy AI initiatives around hiring, the outcomes are connected to business needs and aren't just for the sake of having AI or solely for HR benefits," Galbraith says.

Fluency in executives' business needs is also essential because if HR can't take the lead on coordinating workforce strategy, organizations may end up with a number of disparate approaches to talent—which could make it even harder for the function to achieve its full impact.

"This is an exciting time to be in the people profession, because we've got more tools and resources in our hands to make a business impact than ever before," says Melissa Keiser, executive director, global skills and career development strategy, at Lawrenceville, N.J.–based pharmaceutical company Bristol Myers Squibb.

Yet alignment between HR's work and broader business goals helps support the business impact. It's entirely possible that one department will be led by someone who prizes keeping personnel costs down, for instance, with another led by someone who focuses on filling openings as fast as possible. "If HR doesn't have the gravity to be the central guiding force behind it all, that's what can get you into trouble," says Ben Eubanks, chief research officer at Huntsville, Ala.–based HR consultancy Lighthouse Research and Advisory. Notably, 26% of survey respondents cited the challenge of individual functions, rather than HR, taking charge of sourcing AI talent. But well-prepared HR teams can be instrumental to connecting the dots between what their peers need and how to help them get it.
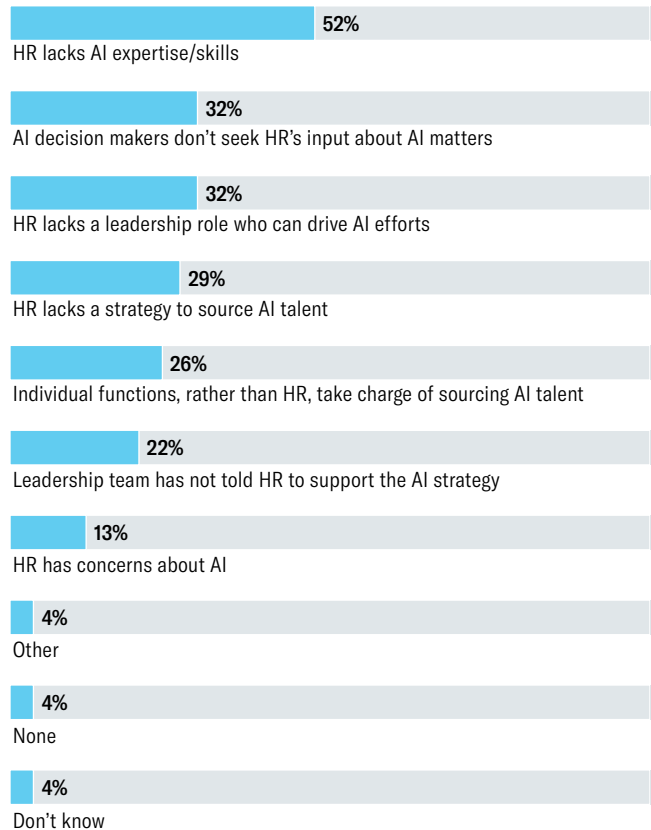
Indeed, a concerted approach to talent will only become more important as the jobs and skills for the AI future keep evolving. If HR teams don't have a comprehensive view of how different capabilities fit together to meet business priorities, they won't be ready to lead the reskilling and upskilling activities that will continue to be crucial. Salesforce has prioritized identifying critical skills that all employees should have to successfully work with AI. "Human and AI agent collaboration, AI literacy, data interpretation—those core elements are things that our entire company needs to understand," Saleforce's Valenzuela explains.

An additional challenge is employees' fear about how technology will affect their jobs and careers. In fact, 39% of survey respondents say employee reluctance about/resistance to using AI is a potential risk their HR department is highly concerned about when it comes to AI adoption. While overcoming these anxieties isn't solely the remit of HR—line managers and executives have a part to play—the

Roadblocks to Involvement in Artificial Intelligence
HR is seen as lacking the necessary technological expertise

What challenges, if any, prevent HR from being more involved in your organization's AI strategy? Select all that apply.

|	
HR lacks AI expertise/skills	52%
AI decision makers don't seek HR's input about AI matters	32%
HR lacks a leadership role who can drive AI efforts	32%
HR lacks a strategy to source AI talent	29%
Individual functions, rather than HR, take charge of sourcing AI talent	26%
Leadership team has not told HR to support the AI strategy	22%
HR has concerns about AI	13%
Other	4%
None	4%
Don't know	4%

Base: 334 respondents whose organizations have some degree of AI strategy.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, February 2025

function may struggle to add more strategic value unless it helps people embrace what AI can do for them. Meeting employees in different states of acceptance about the technology's impact, and dispelling their worries, is something HR is uniquely positioned to tackle and should take the lead on, says Salesforce's Galbraith. "We don't want to operate from a place of fear about AI. We want to operate from a place of what's possible and how great things can be," she says.

Above all else, HR leaders must overcome the perception that supporting the AI strategy is beyond their capabilities. That's no small task, but the only alternative is a continuation of the status quo starkly revealed in the survey. "If HR
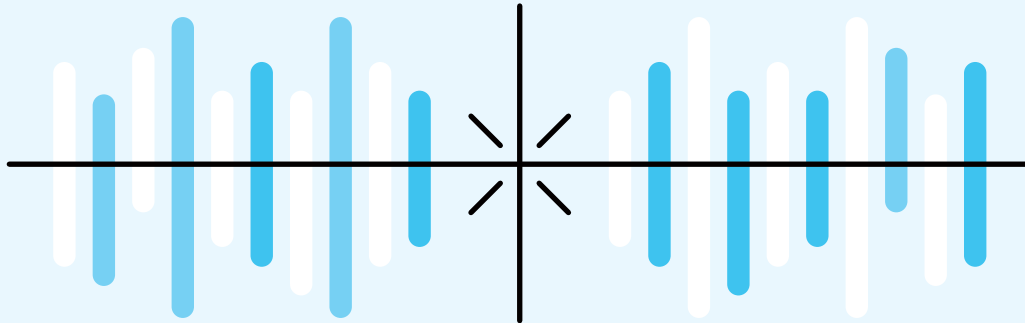
"If HR doesn't have the gravity to be the central guiding force behind it all, that's what can get you into trouble."

Ben Eubanks, chief research officer,
Lighthouse Research and Advisory

isn't stepping into those talent conversations, then they're going to happen anyway—without HR in the room," warns Lighthouse's Eubanks.

Laying the Foundation to Do More

Despite the challenges they face, many HR teams are taking steps to better support their organizations' AI strategies. In the survey, among those at organizations with some degree of AI strategy, the most-cited actions are a trio mentioned by 32% of respondents: working more closely with the chief information officer/chief technology officer to understand the AI strategy, training HR professionals to improve their AI knowledge/skills, and teaching HR employees how AI can be used in their work.

The importance of working more closely with the C-suite is echoed by Eubanks, who says alignment between AI and talent needs to start with alignment between AI decision makers and HR leadership. "If you don't know your leadership's vision for AI adoption in your business, you have to go find the answer immediately," he asserts. If the CEO, for example, wants to automate certain workflows or jobs in the next year, hiring plans have to be refocused around those changes. Or if senior executives want to expand certain functions' capabilities in data analytics, HR must source candidates with appropriate backgrounds. Whatever the goals, alignment helps carry them out.

Regular conversations among functional leaders can keep everyone on the same page. Robert Carruthers, vice president, North America talent acquisition and global strategic skills pipelining, at Leverkusen, Germany–based life sciences company Bayer AG, works closely with colleagues in finance, IT, and procurement, among other departments, so that they can leverage one another's strengths—and aren't acting at cross-purposes. "I can't just go out and buy some AI tech because I saw it at a conference and liked it," he says. "How does it fit into the overarching IT strategy? And how are we going to fund the purchase?"

"If you don't know your leadership's vision for AI adoption in your business, you have to go find the answer immediately," says Lighthouse's Eubanks.

Maintaining close connections with peers is also valuable since it helps HR stay abreast of shifts in business needs and skills requirements. Sometimes, Carruthers points out, executives may have a great view of where their market is going and the people they need; other times, technology advances too fast to be sure. Regardless, partnering across functions helps HR invest time and resources in the right places.

Collaboration is also useful when HR teams don't have the tools or capacity to run all of their analyses themselves. At Bristol Myers Squibb, Keiser's team collaborates with the analytics and total rewards teams to create dashboards that highlight the top 10 current and emerging skills associated with all the job families in the company. "That allows us to really target the most important skills within a function," she says.

And the more effective HR teams are at supporting talent goals, the more support they'll have from senior leadership to pursue value-adding work. Valenzuela explains, for instance, that his team's AI efforts have the backing of the company's entire leadership team, whose members see how crucial their work is. "They all understand the power of what's coming with agentic AI and how important it's going to be to bring the entire workforce through it," he explains. That alignment means his group has the freedom to explore new ways to creatively bolster the workforce; he suggests that other HR leaders be proactive about showing other decision makers what they're doing and why, to cultivate support. "It definitely makes our job tremendously easier when teams see that what we're doing is coming from the top," he says.

FIGURE 2

Reconfiguring Talent Bases for AI
Organizations are gaining crucial skills in several ways

In order to support AI efforts, what talent adjustments is your organization prioritizing (if any)? Select all that apply.

Upskilling/reskilling employees on AI	54%
Encouraging employees with AI skills to work with various teams vs. staying siloed within one team	38%
Hiring new AI-focused talent/roles	29%
Hiring more AI contractors/consultants	17%
None	16%
Don't know	6%
Other	2%

Base: 371 respondents.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, February 2025

The good news, adds Eubanks, is that when executives see that HR can supply them with AI-relevant talent insights, they'll start to raise their expectations of what HR can do. "It's about championing the use of data-driven knowledge in every conversation and opportunity," he says. "Then people start leaning forward when HR folks speak, saying, 'What are you going to say next? I can't wait to hear it.'"

Securing the Right Talent and Skills

Many HR departments are trying new approaches to securing the talent and skills their organizations need. What these approaches have in common is a willingness, on the part of HR and other decision makers, to rethink how the company acquires expertise. For AI goals, in particular, some organizations are rethinking skills altogether—from which ones are the highest priority to where best to get them to how they can be packaged into jobs and careers in new

ways—with implications for recruitment, talent management, compensation, and related areas.

In the survey, respondents point to different talent adjustments their organizations are using, chief of which is upskilling/reskilling employees on AI (mentioned by 54%). Other steps being taken include encouraging employees with AI skills to work with various teams versus staying siloed within one team (38%) and hiring new AI-focused talent/roles (29%). FIGURE 2

At Bristol Myers Squibb, a skills focus is changing how executives think about hiring, which opens fresh possibilities for its talent strategy. The company has traditionally relied on a job hierarchy to define roles and responsibilities. However, HR is now adopting a skills-based approach to identifying the most crucial skills and the necessary knowledge for each role. "Sometimes our job descriptions haven't kept pace with the evolving nature of the work," Keiser notes. "Additionally, we previously lacked the technology to compile comprehensive data on the required skills." The new skills-focused perspective is enabling the company to more effectively plan its roles and identify the best candidates to fill them.

A similar approach is happening at Bayer, which is embracing a "dynamic shared ownership model" where employees work together in 90-day cycles to develop new solutions that drive the business and ultimately better the lives of the farmers, patients, and other customers Bayer serves. The goal, explains Bayer's Carruthers, is to have more flexible teaming that brings together skills from across the company to better capture opportunities and spot issues, enabling more-flexible resource flow against the highest priorities. Being able to more easily leverage employees' wealth of expertise lets Bayer allocate talent and resources where they're needed today, without being constrained by a traditional organizational chart. This flatter model also puts the decision making closer to the customer, improving speed.

Another skills-first effort is taking place at Salesforce, which has introduced an AI-driven "career marketplace" to

> ❝ We're starting to break down traditional job architectures and find where those adjacencies and tangential relationships are, which opens the aperture of what your opportunities are. ❞

Jenn Galbraith, vice president, employee success product management, Salesforce

help employees explore new opportunities. At times, notes Galbraith, employees have found it difficult to advance due to feeling locked into narrow career tracks. The marketplace addresses that problem by showing people all the paths they might pursue with their current skill set, especially unexpected ones. For example, skill analysis reveals significant overlap in the capabilities of recruiters and salespeople, yet a sales professional wanting to move into HR, or vice versa, might have raised eyebrows in the past. Not so anymore, since Salesforce is encouraging people to go wherever their expertise takes them. "We're starting to break down traditional job architectures and find where those adjacencies and tangential relationships are, which opens the aperture of what your opportunities are," Galbraith explains. The result, she adds, is more flexibility in how to deploy people's skills, which can improve retention and employee satisfaction as well as offer managers new sources of talent to fill key roles.

Bristol Myers Squibb, too, has embraced a skills-forward mindset, launching an AI-enabled platform to help employees navigate their development. One challenge with the use of AI, however, is that people often don't know what skills will be needed in the future or how to develop them in a timely manner. The platform addresses the issue by letting employees create LinkedIn-like profiles that enable the organization to better understand people's skills and professional goals. A career navigator tool reveals various roles that are available and the requirements for someone to get to the next level in their career. The system has empowered employees by removing bureaucracy and "rules" from their development paths—and an added benefit is it's helping them embrace AI-enabled tools. "We've seen people get matched to opportunities and completely change lanes," Keiser notes. "People who were in a scientific area have moved into people functions or finance functions." In these ways, Bristol Myers Squibb is working to break down career silos and traditional up-only processes, giving people options to move laterally or in unexpected directions.

Bringing Artificial Intelligence to HR Processes

It isn't just talent strategies and employees that benefit from AI advancements. HR's core work, in activities such as recruiting, evaluating employees, and reskilling/upskilling, can also draw on AI-based tools to become more efficient.

Recruiters and hiring managers at Bristol Myers Squibb, for example, are collaborating to characterize the skills and competencies that define a great candidate. Leveraging AI to provide some inputs helps recruiters match high-quality candidates to open positions more efficiently than ever before. "We've seen a 21% reduction in time to fill since launching the platform," Keiser says.

These kinds of tools are also changing HR's own role, helping recruiters become more like talent advisers. "We'll guide the hiring managers on whether they could consider taking someone who has most of the skills they're looking for and then building whatever they're missing," Keiser explains.

AI is also underpinning the recruiting practices of Bayer. One challenge for its HR team is to keep job descriptions up to date with current trends and in-demand skills. Carruthers' team uses generative AI to refresh job descriptions and candidate communications so they represent the cutting edge of what the company is seeking. The HR group additionally uses chatbots to scan large swaths of information—from PowerPoint presentations to project hard drives—and quickly gather insights for any materials they're creating. The payoff of being able to work faster and smarter has started to shift how his team sees its purpose. "How do you take a recruiter who feels transactional and make them more of a business consultant?" he asks. "That's where some of these tools have really helped out tremendously."
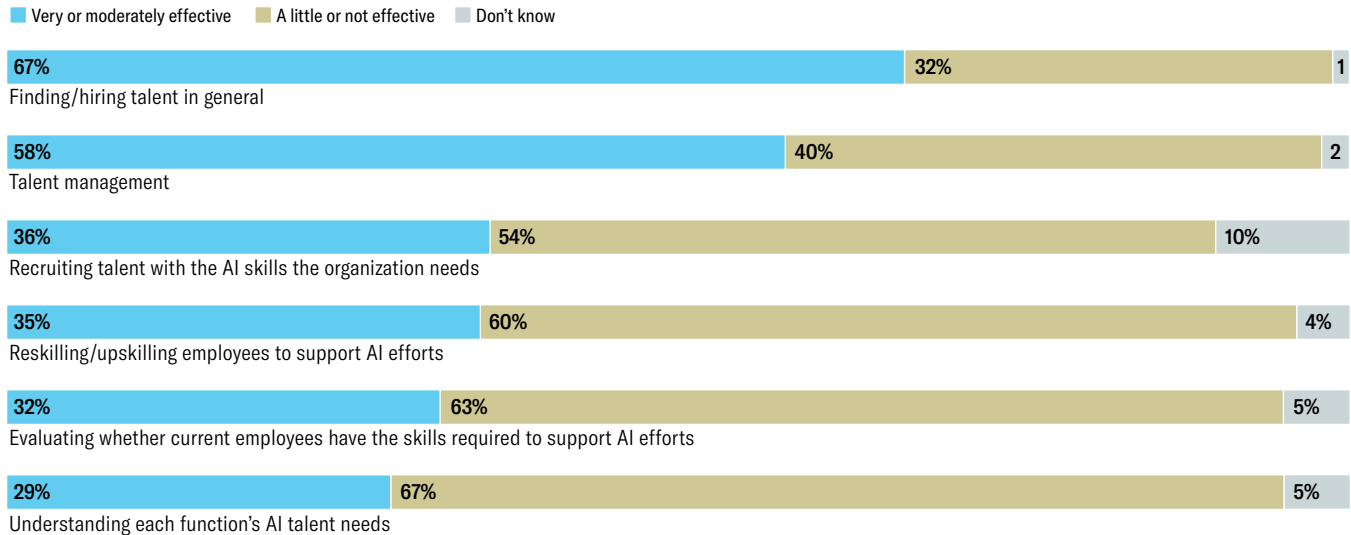
Other key uses for AI tools involve upskilling and helping people find learning opportunities. In his research, Eubanks has seen HR teams harness AI to match employees with projects or mentors that can build new capabilities. The tools can proactively spot potential alignments between

HR's Effectiveness at HR Tasks

The function is better at traditional activities than AI-related ones

How effective is your organization's HR team at the following tasks?

■ Very or moderately effective   ■ A little or not effective   ■ Don't know

	Very or moderately effective	A little or not effective	Don't know
Finding/hiring talent in general	67%	32%	1
Talent management	58%	40%	2
Recruiting talent with the AI skills the organization needs	36%	54%	10%
Reskilling/upskilling employees to support AI efforts	35%	60%	4%
Evaluating whether current employees have the skills required to support AI efforts	32%	63%	5%
Understanding each function's AI talent needs	29%	67%	5%

Base: 371 respondents.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, February 2025

individuals' growth areas and pressing business needs. If someone wants to get better at budgeting and forecasting, for example, HR could help them find either a project to get hands-on experience with or a senior expert who has developed those skills in others.

Eubanks notes that the benefits go far beyond just skill attainment, however. Often organizations must staff projects that will have a tangible impact on their revenues, so decision makers need to be confident the employees assigned are the best ones available. Proactively upskilling people can ensure companies are both strengthening their talent pools and protecting their financial outcomes. "When you're using these tools to learn tangible things, the skill itself is not the end," Eubanks says. "The real end is how it unlocks other opportunities to grow your workforce."

Many HR teams, though, have room to improve when it comes to AI-related tasks and to using AI to perform them. The survey finds that for four key tasks, only around one-third of respondents say the function is either moderately or very effective: reskilling/upskilling employees to support AI efforts (35%), recruiting talent with the AI skills the organization needs (36%), evaluating whether current employees

have the skills required to support AI efforts (32%), and understanding each function's AI talent needs (29%). FIGURE 3

In addition, the survey shows that only a minority of HR teams seem to be using AI to execute these same tasks—and respondents are more likely to say HR isn't using AI for them at all than to say it's using the technology to a moderate or significant degree. The tasks include, for example, evaluating whether current employees have the skills required to support AI efforts (72% a little or no use of AI, 20% moderate or significant use of AI) and understanding each function's AI talent needs (71%, 19%).

Cultivating AI Empowerment

While companies are evolving to capture the full value of AI, a parallel dynamic is how HR leaders and teams themselves must change. Some traditional mindsets and skills remain relevant, but the profile of a great HR professional is shifting. The key capabilities of the future include adaptability and an eagerness to learn, data literacy, curiosity, creative problem-solving, and change management.
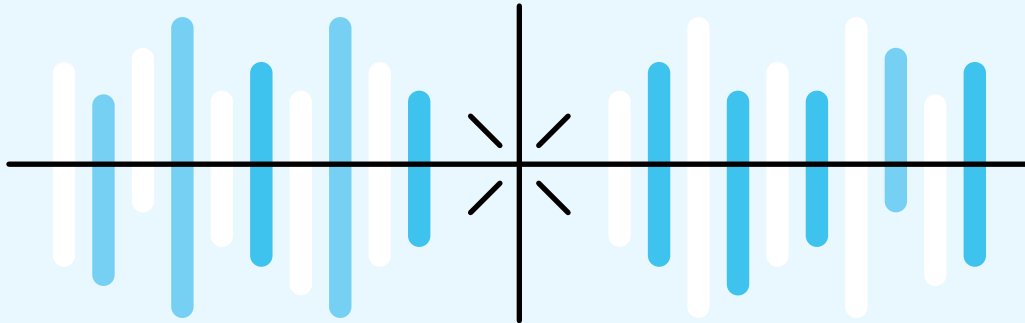
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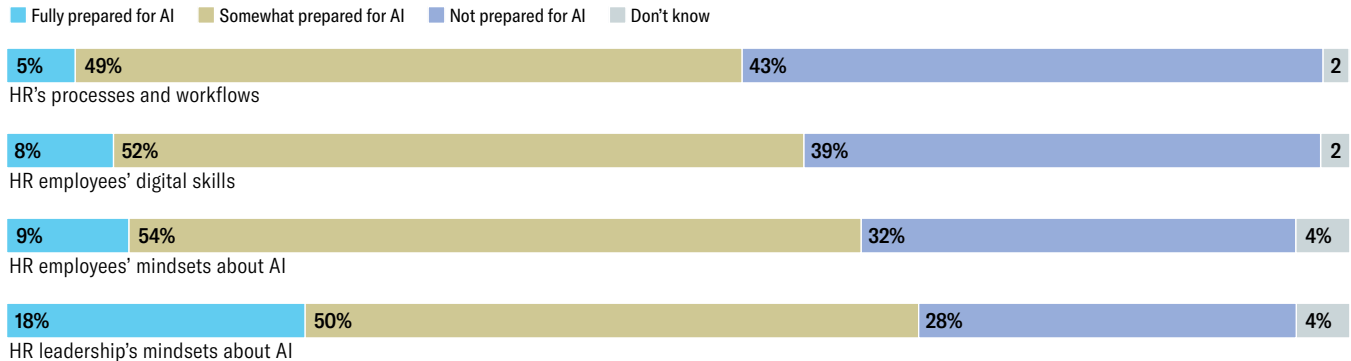
Melissa Keiser, executive director, global skills and career development strategy, Bristol Myers Squibb

A Lack of AI Preparednesss

HR for the most part is only somewhat ready for the technology

To what extent are the following aspects of HR prepared or not prepared to use AI at your organization?

■ Fully prepared for AI   ■ Somewhat prepared for AI   ■ Not prepared for AI   ■ Don't know

5%	49%	43%	2

HR's processes and workflows

8%	52%	39%	2

HR employees' digital skills

9%	54%	32%	4%

HR employees' mindsets about AI

18%	50%	28%	4%

HR leadership's mindsets about AI

Base: 371 respondents.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, February 2025

There is urgency to cultivating these capabilities, since the survey finds HR isn't seen as especially ready to take advantage of AI. Respondents are more likely to say different aspects of the function are not prepared for the technology than fully prepared for it, such as HR's processes and workflows (5% fully prepared for AI, 49% somewhat prepared, 43% not prepared), HR leadership's mindsets about AI (18%, 50%, 28%), HR employees' mindsets about it (9%, 54%, 32%), and HR employees' digital skills (8%, 52%, 39%). FIGURE 4

The ability to learn is paramount for HR teams because AI success will continue requiring new skills, both soft and technical, and new approaches to talent, while long-standing methods remain at risk of becoming obsolete. So having a future-oriented skill set is helpful, but more essential is being able to build new capabilities as business challenges demand it. "One of the big things we are starting to look at is your aptitude to learn," says Galbraith. "When I'm hiring, I'm probably going to look for someone with more direct experience with AI—but that doesn't mean I wouldn't hire someone who I think has the ability to grow those skills." She adds that "experience with AI" isn't always technical—sometimes it's skills that contribute to AI efforts, such as knowing how to make data-driven decisions.

That said, a foundation of data literacy is certainly important. Overseeing a talent strategy focused on AI needs would be difficult without it, so HR employees should prioritize building their facility with data to understand and propose solutions to business challenges that other functions are dealing with. "Being wholly business-minded, as opposed to a born-and-bred HR leader who only thinks about their own role, is critical," says Valenzuela.

A related competency is knowing how to find the story in data and communicate it effectively to stakeholders, a skill that brings together data fluency and a cross-functional perspective. The better that HR teams can talk about trends and potential talent initiatives—and highlight their business value—the more successful they're likely to be.

In addition, as they learn new skills and apply data, being creative in problem-solving will help HR teams think expansively about how best to support business goals. Keiser advises them to think more like technologists—people who are willing to think outside the box, accept a certain level of risk in new ideas, and try different approaches to find the best solution. Given how thoroughly AI is poised to transform talent bases, companies, and processes, the biggest mistake would be for HR to stick to how it has solved problems in the past. "HR solutions all have a technology-enabled footprint now," she says. "We have to be able to bring to bear the kinds of approaches that technology people do."

The final piece of the puzzle is change management skills, which HR professionals will need plenty of. To help carry out enterprise-wide initiatives, teams must have the know-how to sell their ideas to stakeholders and bring people along through the ups and downs of large-scale

change. Given that preparing for AI will be an ongoing task as the technology enables more and more business opportunities, change management skills will likely be a reservoir that HR professionals can draw on for the long term.

At Salesforce, for example, Galbraith's team undertook a significant change management initiative to launch the company's career marketplace. It hosted virtual and in-person career fairs, created instructional videos, and used internal messaging tools to get the word out about what was happening and why—efforts that continue to this day. "We really had to put a robust change management program in place to get employees excited and engaged," Galbraith explains.

Getting Started

For HR executives who want to better support the AI strategy of their firm, there are a few places to start. Among them are partnering with other functional leaders, using small wins to gain decision makers' support, considering whether to appoint a head of AI, and taking action sooner rather than later.

Before they can bolster the company's talent practices, HR teams must first know which business needs, pain points, and goals they can help with. Carruthers says partnerships with functions like IT and finance are critical to both understanding the technical aspects of HR's work and monitoring the costs of new initiatives, helping ensure that tech-driven talent solutions keep people, rather than technology, at their center.

Partnering across functions also keeps peers in the loop about HR's goals and how they'll benefit the company. That kind of understanding can give HR room to experiment with new approaches—and even to learn by failing. "You need to have the support to try things, make mistakes, and apply those learnings," Carruthers says, "so you need to be able to explain to people, financially and culturally, what you're doing for the business."

"You need to have the support to try things, make mistakes, and apply those learnings, so you need to be able to explain to people, financially and culturally, what you're doing for the business," says Robert Carruthers, vice president, North America talent acquisition and global strategic skills pipelining, at Bayer AG.

Along similar lines, HR leaders who want to muster support for ambitious talent initiatives should start with projects they already have the resources for, then use small wins to get leadership on board. A strategic productivity initiative at Bristol Myers Squibb could have resulted in layoffs for some employees. However, the HR team adopted a skills-based approach to redeploy many individuals to new roles where they had the potential to excel. This strategy not only saved millions in severance costs but also significantly boosted employee satisfaction. "When you can demonstrate such impactful results, you're sure to gain the support of senior leaders to expand these efforts," Keiser says.

As for where to target early projects, Valenzuela suggests thinking about the most tactical elements of HR operations and which ones could be automated or made more efficient with AI tools and chatbots. Tasks such as servicing help tickets or pointing people toward answers to HR-related questions are perfect places to start. "Look at the things that are really costly from a human-effort standpoint," he says. "You want your people focused on things that really require human intervention, as opposed to repetitive tasks that technology could handle."

Some HR teams may find it useful to appoint a role that can take ownership of their AI goals. A central coordinator can help optimize resources and staffing, as well as be the

> " **Executives are saying, 'Hey, this AI revolution is happening. What are you doing about it?' None of us have all the answers, but you have to get out there and get in front of it.** "
>
> Salesforce's Valenzuela

point person for collaborating with other departments. Bayer found that having function-specific AI overseers was much more effective than having one for the entire company. Being a global organization, it was simply too large to be agile and productive enough with one person supervising everything; also, functional expertise helps drive what AI can solve. "Now it's up to the AI leaders in each function to facilitate and make sure people are getting what they need to be successful," Carruthers explains.

The survey suggests that organizations may be of two minds about the value of AI leadership roles, at least so far. On one hand, among those whose organization has some degree of AI strategy, 32% of respondents mention the lack of such a role as a challenge preventing HR from being more involved in the AI strategy. On the other, only 18% of them mention the creation of a role as a step HR is taking to better support the strategy. It remains to be seen whether more organizations will adopt AI leadership roles in HR in the years ahead.

Conclusion

Organizations are preparing for the AI future, and HR teams have the opportunity to become key advisers on talent issues to senior executives. To get a seat at the AI table, though, HR leaders should attend to a number of tasks.

On the ground level, they should partner with functional executives to better understand their talent challenges, as well as demonstrate that HR can connect its efforts to key business goals. Externally, they should explore new ways to shore up talent pipelines, from focusing on skills instead of jobs to rethinking how they source and manage talent to reskilling people to help them find new internal career paths—and they should consider how AI tools can improve these activities. And they must use change management skills to help smooth the transition from a workforce built on legacy competencies to one built on AI-relevant capabilities.

HR leaders who fail to leap over these hurdles will hamper their company's ability to compete—and find themselves stuck with the perception of being behind the times. Those who are successful will set their teams up to keep adding value to the talent strategy for years to come. And, in turn, their peers in the C-suite will benefit from innovative talent approaches that enable their workforces to fully capitalize on their investments in AI.
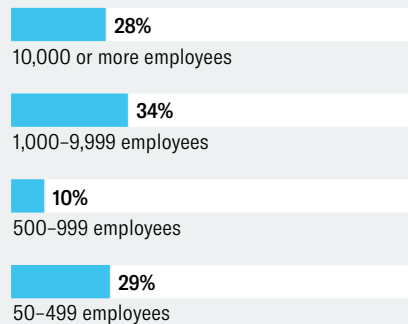
"Executives are saying, 'Hey, this AI revolution is happening. What are you doing about it?'" Valenzuela warns. "None of us have all the answers, but you have to get out there and get in front of it."
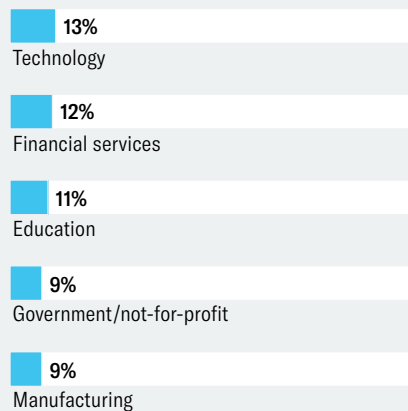
Harvard Business Review Analytic Services surveyed 371 members of the *Harvard Business Review* audience via an online survey fielded in February 2025. Respondents qualified to complete the survey if their organization was moving forward with artificial intelligence (AI) use and they were familiar with their HR leadership's involvement in decisions about the organization's AI strategy.
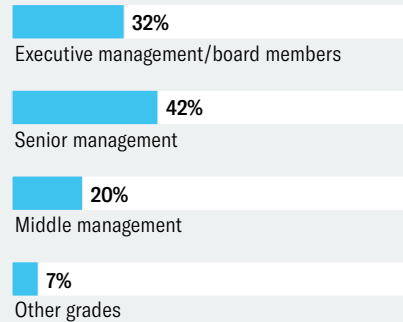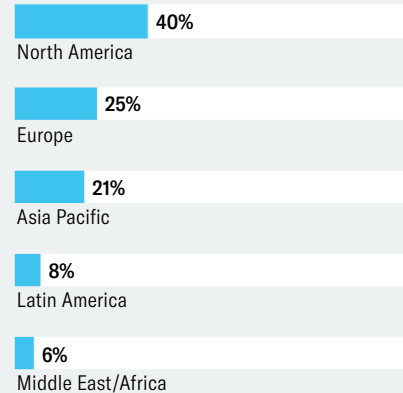
ORGANIZATION SIZE

28%
10,000 or more employees

34%
1,000–9,999 employees

10%
500–999 employees

29%
50–499 employees

SENIORITY

32%
Executive management/board members

42%
Senior management

20%
Middle management

7%
Other grades

JOB FUNCTIONS

26%
HR/training

23%
General/executive management

All other functions less than 7% each.

INDUSTRIES

13%
Technology

12%
Financial services

11%
Education

9%
Government/not-for-profit

9%
Manufacturing

All other sectors less than 9% each.

REGIONS

40%
North America

25%
Europe

21%
Asia Pacific

8%
Latin America

6%
Middle East/Africa