The CEO's guide to agentic AI in HR

How CEOs are shaping the future of tech and talent with intelligent, autonomous AI.

Explore how CEOs can turn the promises of AI into a strategy that supports organizational agility and growth. Embedding agentic AI into talent intelligence platforms empowers HR to find and hire top employees, close skill gaps, and build stronger, more adaptable workforces.

eightfold.ai

The AI opportunity

The race for reinvention is on.

According to PwC's 28th "Annual Global CEO Survey," 40% of CEOs believe that their companies won't be viable in 10 years if they continue on their current paths. CEOs are under enormous pressure — and shrinking timelines — to turn AI's potential into ROI, but when 70% of transformations fail, the margin for error is slim.

With McKinsey estimating the long-term AI opportunity at $4.4 trillion in added productivity growth, with 92% of companies planning to increase AI investments in the next three years, integrating AI into strategic operations is now an imperative for every CEO. In fact, half of CEOs told PwC that their biggest priorities over the next three years are integrating AI into technology platforms as well as business processes and workflows.

But today's CEOs must invest in the right AI solutions in the right areas of the business, a daunting task with so many types of AI and potential use cases. In this brief, we explore how talent intelligence platforms with agentic AI can help you build an agile workforce ready for change, while reducing costs, increasing revenue, and securing a competitive advantage for tomorrow.

From generative to agentic AI

Generative AI has captured the attention of nearly every business leader. Nearly half (49%) of CEOs told PwC that they expect gen AI to increase profitability over the next year — and for good reason. Organizations investing in AI see an average return of [$3.7 for every dollar invested](), according to a recent study from IDC and Microsoft, with the top 5% of leaders in AI adoption seeing even higher returns of around $10.

In just a few years, gen AI has transformed how we work, including how we make content, write code, and automate tasks. Now, the next leap for enterprises is here — a shift from reactive, prompted tools to independent, intelligent agents that boost productivity, reduce costs, and drive competitive advantage.

The future of gen AI is agentic AI, with the race for CEOs to adopt agentic AI integrations now taking center stage for many leaders. But the big question remains about where CEOs should focus first with agentic AI in the tech stacks for maximum impact in a short time.

With the rise of AI agents — digital workers that can "reason, plan, and act" — organizations can now scale workforces as needed. The majority of business leaders, 82%, say this is a "pivotal" year to rethink strategy and operations, with 81% expecting agentic AI to be "moderately or extensively" integrated into their AI strategies in the coming 12-18 months, according to Microsoft's report, "[2025: The Year the Frontier Firm is Born]()." Already, a [KPMG]() Pulse Survey states that over half of organizations "are exploring the use of AI agents, and 65% are piloting AI agents."

But with high-speed, high-stakes transformations, there's always risk.

Many AI projects fail because organizations [lack the right skills](). Another reason they fail, according to Deloitte's "[2025 Global Human Capital Trends]()," is unrealistic business use cases. The result?

Many leaders sink considerable time and capital into buying and implementing new technologies, only to change direction later or realize they have invested in redundant technologies.

For CEOs to make the most of their AI investments and build an agile, adaptable workforce, they must invest strategically.

The cost of getting agentic AI wrong

Before investing in agentic AI, it's critical to vet vendors and ask questions to ensure you're purchasing a true agent. Failure to differentiate between true agentic AI and false agents could lead to:

Systems that require constant oversight and reconfiguration.

Escalating costs from inefficiencies, redundant work, and continuous patching.

Losing trust from systems that overpromise and underdeliver.

Security and compliance gaps from mishandled sensitive data.

Falling behind as competitors deploy adaptive, self-improving systems.

The role of talent intelligence

Talent intelligence platforms are dynamic, always-on platforms that use deep-learning and agentic AI, distilling billions of data global data points and empowering your HR team with agents to help them make better, faster, and more strategic talent decisions.

Why does that matter in the context of AI?

Because in the next five years, 70% of the skills used in most jobs today will change, according to LinkedIn's "Work Change Report: AI Is Coming to Work." This impending seismic skills shift is echoed throughout labor research, with the World Economic Forum's (WEF) 2025 "Future of Jobs" report stating that the need for upskilling and reskilling is so significant that "if the world's workforce was made up of 100 people, 59 would need training by 2030."

Your organization needs the best talent with the right skills to realize and make the most of AI's value — and you need it today.

With talent intelligence platforms, you can:

Identify, hire, and upskill talent with the skills needed today — and the potential to learn the ones you'll need tomorrow.

Inform data-driven succession planning based on merit, skills, and potential.

Make informed hiring decisions based on real-time data and an expanded talent pool — not just keywords — while improving the candidate experience.

Create personalized learning pathways for employees complementary to the organization's goals.

Without agentic AI, talent intelligence platforms can tell you who to hire, but they won't help you *run* the hiring process. With a talent intelligence platform and agentic AI, your talent teams can deploy autonomous agents that help:

- **Schedule interviews** based on hiring managers' and recruiters' preferences.

- **Conduct interviews** at the candidate's convenience, and give recruiters an agent that is always available.

- **Write, adjust, and send communications** based on real-time candidate engagement (or lack of engagement).

- **Learn and adapt** through every interaction.

Benefits of agentic AI for CEOs

1 | Source highly skilled talent

One of the most impactful ways AI has saved organizations money is by reducing head count, but surprisingly, most CEOs told PwC that they expect their head counts to increase rather than decrease in the year ahead.

What's driving this shift?

While AI can automate an impressive 40-60% of repetitive work, according to Deloitte, only a fraction of complex tasks can be automated. Analytical thinking remains the most prized skill among employers, according to the WEF, with 70% of companies considering it absolutely critical in 2025. In tandem with the rising need for flexible thinking is the growing need for the ability to effectively work with AI.

Future workforces will need highly adaptable, agile employees who can quickly learn new skills — and show potential to work alongside AI.

Organizations are nearly six times more likely to see significant ROI from AI when their workers use these tools, according to Deloitte. While head count cuts eventually hit a breaking point, productivity gains from AI are virtually limitless.

"Six in 10 workers already think of AI as a co-worker."

— "Stagility: Creating stability for workers for organizations to move at speed," Deloitte, *2025 Human Capital Trends*

With AI and big data skills topping the WEF's list of fastest-growing skills, skilled technical talent with AI know-how is surging in demand. Couple this growing need with an impending talent shortage, and you can quickly see how important it is to find and build a highly skilled team today.

Talent intelligence platforms can help you create a more adaptable workforce by sourcing this highly skilled talent. These platforms instantly uncover the rising and falling skills in your industry, the skills your team needs, and the candidates with the highest potential to meet those needs.

Armed with those insights, your team can partner with HR to build, buy, or borrow talent — in other words, upskill, hire, or contract out work with the skills that will drive long-term success across your entire organization.

Top 10 fastest growing skills by 2030

1 AI and big data	**6** Curiosity and lifelong learning
2 Networks and cybersecurity	**7** Leadership and social influence
3 Technological literacy	**8** Talent management
4 Creative thinking	**9** Analytical thinking
5 Resilience, flexibility, and agility	**10** Environmental stewardship

*Source: World Economic Forums | **Future of Jobs Report 2025***

2 Empower HR to do more, faster and smarter

False agentic AI applications are everywhere. These are tools that rely on predefined workflows and single-shot prompts and run the risk of draining your budget while not delivering what your organization truly needs.

On the other hand, developing your own agentic AI requires significant investment and coordination, including developing multi-layered systems that reconcile dozens of specialized processes and evolve as these work.

Talent intelligence platforms with embedded agentic AI deliver the promise of AI right out of the box — which is good news for your HR team, as they're the ones who need to find skilled talent right away.

Here's an easy chart to compare the fundamental differences between true agentic AI and false agents.

	Rule-based systems	Traditional automation	Agentic AI
Decision-making	Follows rules as written. No ability to adjust.	Follows a set list of steps. Can't skip, reorder, or choose a better path if something changes.	Continuously reasons through shifting inputs and goals.
Adaptability	None.	Limited to known scenarios.	Dynamically adjusts paths mid-task, reflects on outcomes, and redirects without manual intervention.
Product & data usage	Runs tools in a fixed way — no matter the task or outcome.	Sends the same request to a tool every time — can't adapt to what's needed at the moment.	Selects, orchestrates, and switches tools autonomously based on task evolution.
Memory	Doesn't learn from past interactions — treats each input in isolation.	Doesn't remember past interactions — treats each input in isolation.	Works in context, tracking past actions, decisions, and preferences.
Proactiveness	Only acts with direction and needs a specific input to start a task.	Watches for preset moments then responds, but can't anticipate needs or prep ahead.	Monitors, identifies gaps, and takes initiative, even across long-running tasks.
Transparency	Decisions and actions are baked into code that doesnt change.	Exact steps are clear, but there is no explanation or reasoning behind the steps	Provides clear, easy-to-read reasoning behind decisions.

For talent teams juggling complexity and high volume, true agentic AI goes deeper than automating clicks or sending reminders. It runs entire workflows, adapts as things change, and applies human-like judgment across thousands of moving parts.

This is more than offloading busy work. True agentic AI expands your HR team's *thinking powers*. That means handling not just tasks but decisions, adjustments, and reflection. Real agents lift both the manual and mental weight by spotting issues early, keeping processes healthy, and giving your team more space to focus on strategy.

False agents trap teams in endless patchwork: constantly rewriting prompts, overseeing brittle workflows, and manually correcting what the system failed to catch.

Global power management company Eaton used an AI-powered talent intelligence platform to transform recruiting processes, as Deloitte reported. The company saw:

- **4x increase** in talent network size.

- **30-40% boost** in candidate velocity.

- **Double-digit improvements** across all recruiting metrics, including time to market, time to present, and time to offer.

Many other businesses are seeing similar results with talent intelligence platforms.

"For CEOs focused on workforce optimization, AI agents can support strategic planning and execution. Expanding team capacity with digital labor (45% of leaders' top priority) and upskilling existing employees (47% of leaders' top priority) are key workforce strategies being considered over the next 12-18 months."

— "Microsoft, "2025: The Year the Frontier Firm is Born"

3 | Sharpen your competitive edge

While McKinsey reports that virtually every business plans to increase AI investments, only 1% of leaders consider their company "mature" in its current deployment.

That means there's a huge opportunity for early adopters.

But that's only if organizations can align their leadership, talent, and technology. Accenture found that 87% of reinvention-ready companies — those most likely to realize AI's value — possess "extensive collaboration" between tech and business teams.

While CEOs don't need to code, they must intentionally orchestrate adoption and reinvention by aligning talent, tech, and culture around new ways of thinking and working. Realizing the benefits of AI agents will require more than adopting the technology — it's a business challenge that demands alignment among the C-suite to lead their organizations in change.

While almost half of CEOs prioritize integrating AI into technology platforms, business processes, and workflows, only about a third are planning to integrate AI into workforce and skills strategy, which is considered a misstep, according to PwC's CEO survey.

AI will be the strategic differentiator, helping employees master new skills, with 83% of global leaders in the Microsoft study saying that AI will let workers tackle more complex, strategic work.
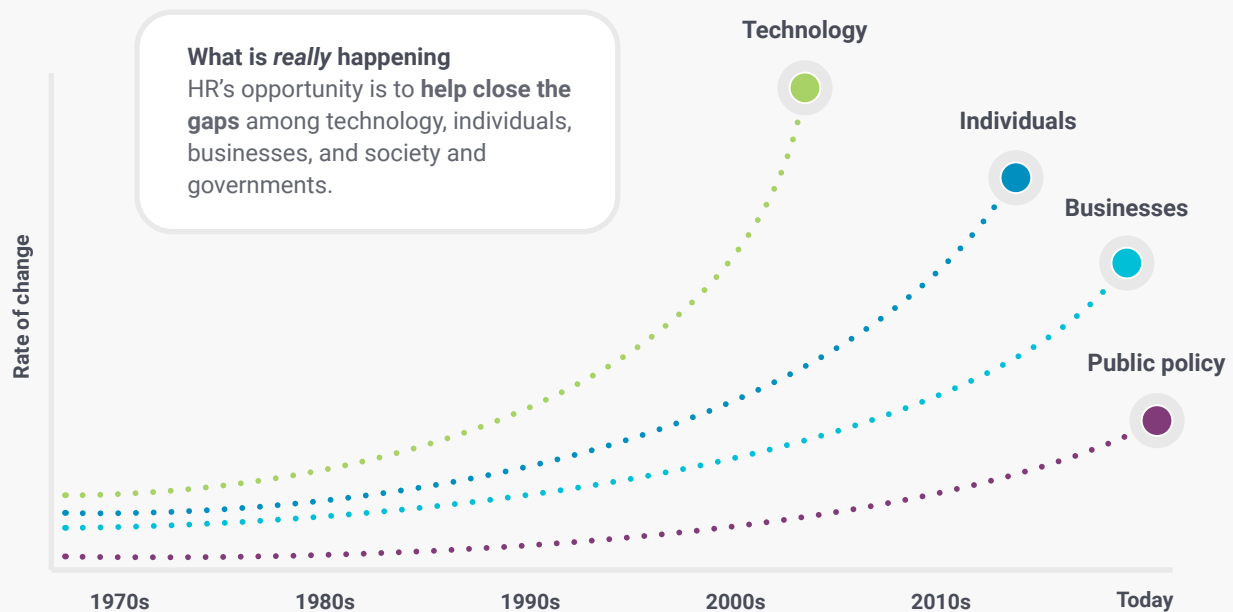
83% of global leaders say that AI will let workers tackle more complex and strategic work.

— "Microsoft, "2025: The Year the Frontier Firm is Born"

Organizations that prioritize developing talent will be "nearly twice as likely to have workers who feel their work is meaningful and twice as likely to have better financial and business results," according to Deloitte.

The world has its eyes on what AI — especially agentic AI — can achieve in business. CEOs who lead the way in adoption will outperform competitors for years to come.

The rate of adopters, individuals, society, businesses, and government agencies

What is *really* happening
HR's opportunity is to **help close the gaps** among technology, individuals, businesses, and society and governments.

Technology

Individuals

Businesses

Public policy

Rate of change

1970s   1980s   1990s   2000s   2010s   Today

Source: Deloitte University Press | dupress.deloitte.com

CEO's talent intelligence cheat sheet

Talent intelligence platforms can help you find top talent and integrate with existing HR workflows to immediately benefit every stage, from hiring to upskilling. Agentic AI takes those benefits a step further by working with and for your team — offering generative insights, assistance, and augmenting complex processes. Cutting busywork and enhancing decision-making lets your HR team focus on building a more resilient, adaptable workforce ready for change.

Top concerns/strategic focus:

- Developing business strategy.
- Driving long-term profitability and improving shareholder sentiment.
- Staying ahead of market disruption and competitors.

Key challenges:

- Lack of IT talent with AI and other in-demand skills.
- Slowing economic growth and rising inflation.
- Remaining profitable amid disruption and changing customer expectations.

Talent intelligence platforms help by:

- Attracting and retaining highly valuable technical talent.
- Offering built-in talent agents to source the right talent, empower HR, and promote internal mobility.
- Promoting organizational health and profitability with data-driven hires and employee development.

Questions to think about:

- Do you feel your team has the skills it needs to succeed over the next one to three years?
- What are the most critical factors to consider when implementing a new AI solution in HR (business value, deployment speed, cost, security, or something else)?
- How do you think the organization would change if every department had insights into its skills mix — including any skills gaps?

Build a modern workforce with talent intelligence and agentic AI

Agentic AI represents more than just the start of the next hype cycle. Its arrival is an inflection point where CEOs must decide how their organizations will work — and compete — over the next decade.

As a CEO, you're in a strategic position to shape this transformation and ensure that AI adoption doesn't stop at scripted, prompted tools but extends into systems that can act with judgment and learn over time.

At Eightfold, we're ready to help you lead that transformation. Our Talent Intelligence Platform combines your enterprise data, market trends, and real-time work signals to build a dynamic understanding of your workforce. By modeling skills, capabilities, aspirations, and the work people perform every day, our platform helps you anticipate talent needs, close skill gaps, and drive productivity.

The result: faster, smarter decisions across hiring, development, and planning — and a lasting talent advantage.

See how other great organizations are transforming their workforces with AI.

About Eightfold AI

Eightfold Talent Intelligence is evolving into Talent Advantage — an end-to-end system that acts, not just analyzes. Eightfold AI engages with candidates from the moment of interest, screening, interviewing, and selecting top talent. Once hired, each employee's digital twin accelerates onboarding, amplifies productivity, and surfaces real-time insights from across the organization. With a unified platform for internal mobility and growth, CHROs can now lead a workforce that is engaged, adaptive, self-improving, and most importantly, productive. Our patented deep-learning and generative AI platform is available in more than 155 countries and 24 languages, enabling cutting-edge enterprises to transform their talent into a competitive advantage. For more information, visit www.eightfold.ai.

eightfold.ai