


EXECUTIVE BRIEF

The COO's guide to agentic AI in HR

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



Learn how to transform your organization with talent intelligence platforms embedded with agentic AI to close skills gaps, cut costs, and build an agile workforce ready for change.



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.

Today's chief operating officers are under tremendous pressure alongside their CEOs to invest in the right AI solutions, a daunting task with so many potential use cases and types of AI. In this brief, we explore how talent intelligence platforms integrated with agentic AI can help you build more agile workforces, reduce costs, improve efficiency, and secure a competitive advantage for tomorrow.



From generative to agentic AI

Generative AI has captured the attention of nearly every business, with McKinsey [estimating](#) that gen AI could contribute up to \$4.4 trillion to global GDP by 2030. According to a [new study](#) from IDC and Microsoft, organizations investing in AI see an average of \$3.7 for every dollar invested, with the top 5% of leaders in AI adoption seeing even higher returns around \$10 on the dollar.

In the span of months, gen AI has transformed how we work: how we source information, communicate, code, and so much more. 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.

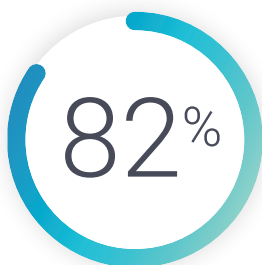
With the rise of AI agents — digital workers that can “reason, plan, and act” — organizations can scale workforces as needed, and adoption is already well underway. According to Microsoft [research](#), 81% of leaders expect AI agents to be deeply integrated into their company's AI strategy in the next year and a half. 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](#), 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 COOs to make the most of their AI investments and build workforces ready for anything, they must invest strategically.



of leaders say they're confident that they'll use digital labor to expand workforce capacity in the next 12–18 months.

– “[2025: The Year the Frontier Firm Is Born](#),” Microsoft

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, generative, and agentic AI to distill billions of global data points, helping your HR team and organization make better, faster, and more strategic talent decisions.

Why does that matter today?

Because [in the next five years](#), 70% of workers' core skills will change. According to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) "[Future of Jobs Report 2025](#)," 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 highly valuable technical skills to realize — and maximize — AI's value

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.

Talent intelligence platforms without agentic AI can tell you who to hire, but they can't help your HR team *run* the hiring process. With a talent intelligence platform embedded with agentic AI, you can reap all the benefits of traditional platforms while deploying 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 and talent intelligence for COOs

1

Source highly skilled talent

One of the most impactful ways gen AI has saved organizations money is by reducing head count, but AI is now poised to create more jobs than it's replacing. According to the WEF, there will be approximately 170 million new jobs by 2030 — the equivalent of 14% of today's global workforce.

What's driving this job boom?

While AI can automate an impressive 40-60% of repetitive work, saving your organization a lot of money and time, 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 work alongside AI.

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

— ["Stagility: Creating stability for workers for organizations to move at speed,"](#) Deloitte

Organizations are nearly six times more likely to see significant ROI from AI when their workers work alongside these tools. While head count cuts eventually hit a breaking point, productivity gains from AI are virtually limitless. To succeed, your workforce needs highly adaptable, AI-literate employees who can quickly learn new skills.

Talent intelligence platforms can help you create a more adaptable workforce by sourcing this highly skilled talent. These platforms instantly uncover the skills that are rising or falling in the industry, which 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, striking the right balance between digital and human workers.

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 Forum | Future of Jobs Report 2025](#)

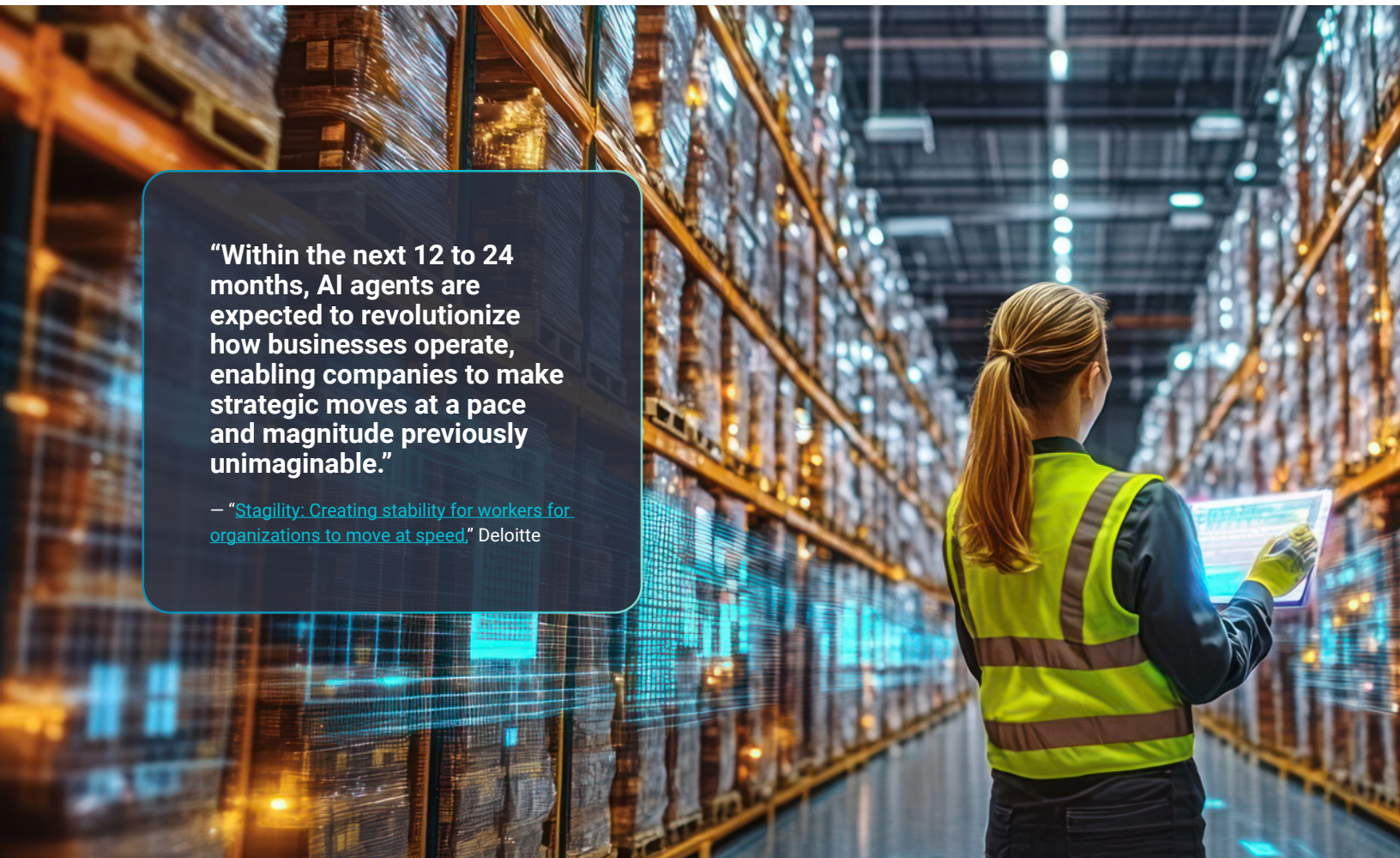
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Empower HR to do more

The most immediate benefit of these platforms will be for your HR team, the masterminds behind every hire. Unfortunately, false agentic AI applications are rampant. 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 complex systems that reconcile dozens of specialized processes and evolve as they 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 urgently find skilled talent.

A woman with blonde hair in a ponytail, wearing a high-visibility yellow safety vest over a dark long-sleeved shirt, stands in a large warehouse aisle. She is holding a tablet computer and looking at the screen. The warehouse has high ceilings and rows of shelving units filled with boxes. The lighting is industrial, with some blue and yellow tones. A quote is overlaid on the left side of the image.

“Within the next 12 to 24 months, AI agents are expected to revolutionize how businesses operate, enabling companies to make strategic moves at a pace and magnitude previously unimaginable.”

— [“Stagility: Creating stability for workers for organizations to move at speed,”](#) Deloitte

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 doesn’t 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 busywork. 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.



3 Sharpen your competitive edge

McKinsey reports that [virtually every](#) business (92%) plans to increase its AI investment over the next three years, but only 1% of leaders consider their company “mature” in its current deployment.

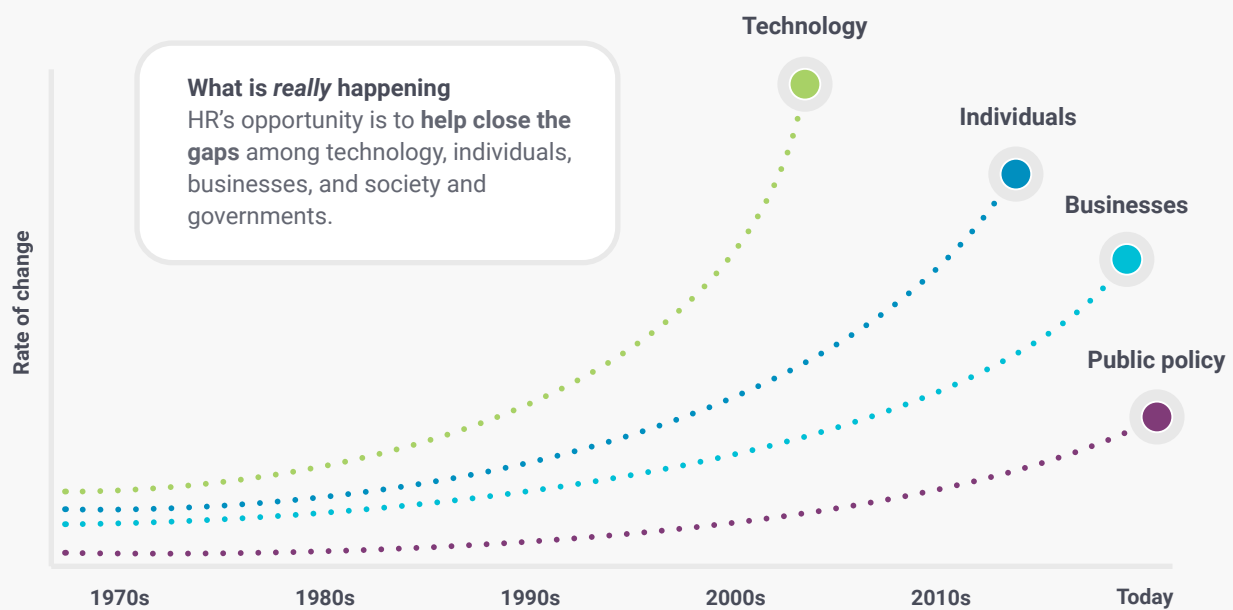
That means there’s a *huge* opportunity for early adopters.

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 their tech and business teams. While COOs 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.

On the flip side, there’s a massive opportunity cost to *waiting* too long to adopt and adapt. One study found that organizations with strong innovation can [better spot new opportunities and extract more value from their tech investments](#), but the same can’t be said for those lagging in adoption.

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

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



Source: Deloitte University Press | dupress.deloitte.com

COO's talent intelligence cheat sheet

Talent intelligence platforms can help your HR team source highly technical, AI-literate talent by instantly enhancing every stage of the talent life cycle, from hiring to reskilling. Even better, leading talent intelligence platforms can integrate with your existing HR infrastructure and deploy in as little as a few weeks, keeping total cost of ownership (TCO) low and ROI high. The immediate benefit is better quality hires. The long-term benefit is an organization with agile skills and high-performing, engaged workers.

Agentic AI takes those benefits a step further by adapting to your HR team, offering generative insights and assistance, and augmenting complex processes. Reducing busywork and enhancing decision-making lets your HR team focus on building a more resilient, adaptable workforce ready for change.



Top concerns/strategic focus:

- Staying ahead of labor shortages and employee turnover while maintaining the right internal talent and enabling them to work efficiently.
- Ensuring successful technical implementation and quick adoption of the latest technologies.
- Digitizing operations for optimal productivity and profitability.

Key challenges:

- Achieving more with the same budget.
- Identifying talent gaps and creating a plan to address them so that talent strategy is aligned with business strategy.
- Turnover and skills gaps between available and needed talent.

Talent intelligence platforms help by:

- Finding, attracting, and hiring high-performing talent with the technical skills needed for the future.
- Streamlining HR processes to improve and enhance HR workflows, including recruiting, development, upskilling, reskilling, and succession planning.
- Offering built-in talent agents to help source the right talent, empower HR, and promote internal mobility.
- Increasing retention through personalized career pathways and development opportunities.

Questions to think about:

- Do you feel your organization has the skills it needs to succeed over the next one to three years?
- In what ways can the HR team help in optimizing our workforce planning and organizational productivity? How would AI enhance that process?
- In what ways would strategic, data-driven workforce planning help your organization become more productive and resilient?
- How do you plan to use generative and agentic AI to reduce costs and improve productivity?



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 COOs must decide how their organizations will work — and compete — over the next decade.

As a COO, 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.