

THE FUTURE OF WORK IN 2026:

8 HR trends reshaping the global workforce



TODAY'S SPEAKERS



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The Future Of Work In 2026:
**8 HR TRENDS
RESHAPING
THE GLOBAL
WORKFORCE**



Poll 1

P1

BURNOUT AS A BOARD-LEVEL HAZARD

**Burnout has always been costly;
what is at stake is who pays for it**

- Burnout is a chronic state of work-related exhaustion, cynicism, and professional inefficacy due to feeling a lack of progress
- Burnout is a clarity of purpose problem not a hard work problem
- Is burnout a...
 - Employee resilience problem
 - Corporate culture/benefits/training problem
 - Government treatment problem



Research suggests that about 82% of the US workforce is at risk of burnout with annual costs of \$4,000 to \$21,000 per employee in lost productivity and turnover.

P2

TIME OUT-VALUES MONEY

Cost of living spikes block outsourcing work-life conflict fixes - people need time back

- High salaries are the top reason people **switch** jobs
- Control over one's schedule is the primary reason people **stay in a job**
- The urgency for time flexibility is driven by a combination of caregiver needs and doubt that hard work pays off in the long-run; while schedule control pays off right now



Work-life balance has overtaken salary as the leading priority for office workers globally, cited by 65% of respondents—up from 59% in 2022.

Bosses are fighting a new battle in the RTO wars: It's not about where you work, but when you work

Beyond Mandates: The Future of Hybrid Work

P3

DIGITIZED WORK POWERS AI ADVANTAGE

The power of AI is to connect what is isolated, but only if it can be digitized

- AI empowered tools create business value when they **connect digital silos** to deliver holistic insights and workflows
- Work that happens outside of digital environments is invisible to AI (e.g. face to face meeting in an office)
- Maximizing the power of AI requires pulling more data into the digital landscape (e.g. meeting transcripts)
- Digitizing more work may be confused with surveillance and micro-management; and prove a possible counterweight to RTO



63% of organizations do not have or are unsure if they have the right data management practices for AI.

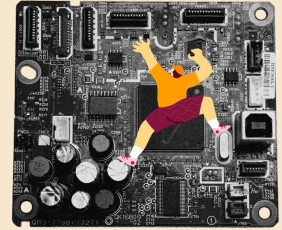
Gartner estimates 60% of AI projects will be abandoned by the end of 2026 due to a lack of AI-ready data.

P4

KNOWLEDGE ↓, CONFIDENT JUDGMENT ↑

AI is not shrinking workforces, its reshuffling them and pushing entry-level employees out

- Research suggests that AI automations actually grow workforces within 2-3 years of adoption
- The staffing shifts from infrastructure roles to value creation roles
- AI knows more than it understands, making it most useful in the hands of experienced employees who can recognize quality and refine AI products
- Reskilling administrative employees for value creation roles will become critical



More than half of employers report regretting laying off workers for AI and expect AI to ultimately increase their headcount, not decrease it

Research shows increased hiring and wages in 140 AI exposed industries relative to less AI exposed roles in recent years

[The effects of AI on firms and workers](#)

[The AI layoff trap: Why half will be quietly rehired](#)

[The surprising truth about AI's impact on jobs](#)

SKILLS AS BUILDING BLOCKS OF MODERN WORK

A tale of two hiring models: Skills vs. Experience

- Skills based jobs has been an impending transformation for some time, offering greater fidelity in task alignment than experience (e.g. job titles and degrees)
- Skills based approaches are ungainly as they create huge catalogues of skills and job descriptions that need to be defined, cross-referenced, and updated
- AI opens a new path by smoothing out the labor needed to manage those approaches
- Rollout and adoption of [AI skills tools](#) is key to this prediction, without it organizations [revert to experience](#) models

The screenshot shows a dashboard with four tabs: Skills catalog, Skills and hiring, Skills and performance, and Skills and learning. The 'Skills catalog' tab is active, displaying a 'Generate Skills' button and a table of skills.

Elevate skills across the entire employee journey

Skills catalog Skills and hiring Skills and performance Skills and learning

Skills catalog

Create a unified, company-wide skills framework

Define the skills that matter most for every role and standardize expectations across teams.

- Customizable skills and proficiency levels
- AI-assisted or manual creation options
- Connected to job profiles across the organization
- Centralized visibility of all skill data

Skill	Category	Status	De
Data Analysis		Active	
Business Writing		Draft	
Innovation & Creativity		Inactive	
Problem Solving		Active	
Emotional communication		Active	

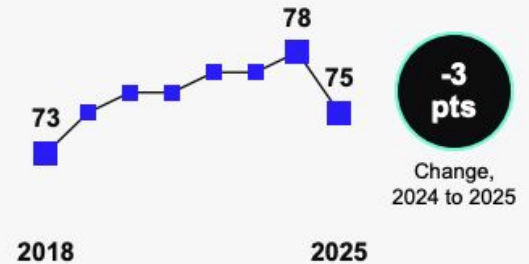
P6

PAY TRANSPARENCY

Pay transparency- better for employers than they realize

- Trust in employers showed a sudden decline worldwide in 2025 particularly among lower income employees
- Trust in leaders is strongly connected to engagement with a 25 point gap in engagement based on level of trust in leadership
- Pay secrecy enables narratives of discrimination justifying lower motivation and greater openness to external opportunities, motivating governments to pass pay transparency laws
- Ironically studies suggest that pay transparency removes pay inequities at the expense of overall wage reductions

I trust my employer
to do what is right



2025 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report

P7

CLIMATE RESHAPE WORKFORCE PLANNING

While disasters get the attention, it's the small things that subtly spike costs and uncertainty

Water shortages

- Higher cost for homes, businesses, hydro-power, data centers
- Shipping delays when waterways become constrained

Infrastructure obsolescence

- Commuting/travel is less reliable in heatwaves & heavy rains
- Energy grids and budgets strain to heat and cool sub-optimal workplaces

Workforce Geography

- Increasingly common extreme events reshape workforce geography and insurance rates



left - Mike McMillan/USFS, center - Tomas Castelazo / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY-SA 4.0, right - NASA



(U.S. Department of Transportation)

P8

EARNING AI TRUST

*Employees/Employers want the same things-
Employees just aren't seeing it*

- People use AI (55% of the US 18-64 population); its achieved levels of penetration that took the personal computer 16 years to reach
- People are much less likely to use it at work (37%), given the risks of an AI error and lack of common time savings



Employee fears of AI:

45% inaccurate and unreliable AI

23% job loss

16% lack of human oversight



Employee hopes for AI:

69% free time for high value work

47% reduce task repetitiveness
and improve work quality



Yet, people using it for work in
the US report **saving only 1.75%**
of their total work hours

Poll 2

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[Link to guide](#)



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