

Gartner®

HR Toolkit: 9 Future of Work Trends for 2024

Key insights and actionable strategies for HR leaders crafting organizational resilience

2024 brings another wave of challenges and opportunities for the future of work. Organizations face unprecedented uncertainty with global talent shortages, controlling rising costs and measuring risky technology's productivity returns — and will need to tackle 2024's nine trends to set and achieve strategic workforce and technology goals. This toolkit provides insights and actions for HR leaders as they assess how the future of work will impact their organization in the face of heightened expectations.

9 Future of Work Trends for 2024

1

The Cost-of-Work Crisis Reaches a Breaking Point

2

AI Creates, Not Diminishes, Workforce Opportunity

3

Four-Day Workweeks Go From Radical to Routine

4

Employee Conflict Resolution Is the New Must-Have Skill for Managers

5

GenAI Experiments Will Yield Hard Lessons and Painful Costs

6

Skills Overtake Degrees as the Paper Ceiling Crumbles

7

Climate Change Protection Becomes the New In-Demand Employee Benefit

8

DEI Doesn't Disappear, It Becomes the Way We Work

9

Career Stereotypes Collapse in the Face of Workforce Change

1

The cost-of-work crisis reaches a breaking point

While working from home during the pandemic, many employees experienced (often for the first time) what work can be like without bearing all the costs — financial, time and energy — associated with going into an office daily. Unsurprisingly, many employees want to continue working in a hybrid and/or remote setting permanently. Yet 63% of employers increased the number of required days in the office in the last 12 months. In the face of employers mandating remote employees' return to the office after long periods of remote work, employees now have a sharper awareness of what they "spend" to go to work.

What was once largely assumed by employers and employees — employees bear the cost of work when they agree to take a job — can no longer be taken for granted. Going into the office every day is simply too costly for many employees.¹ Combine that with a belief that they can do their job perfectly well away from the office and you have the ingredients for sustained pushback. The cost of work, who bears it and why, is now up for discussion, and return-to-office (RTO) strategies without full resolution of these questions will likely remain contentious.

In the coming year, organizations looking to attract and retain talent will not just try to find the perfect hybrid strategy, but will look to tackle the cost of work head-on. Organizations can do this in one of two ways: 1) by sharing the tangible and intangible costs of returning to the office, or 2) by finding ways to reduce the total costs. These may include: caregiving benefits, housing subsidies, financial well-being programs, on-site kennels or the ability to bring your pet to work. For example, Walmart, Tyson Foods, and Numis have invested in on-site childcare and early learning centers. IKEA, Samsung, Cook Medical, Disney, JBS, Deloitte UK and other companies have built housing specifically for their employees to rent or buy below market rates.



Take Action:

[Tactics to Bring Employees Back-to-Office Without Disengaging Them](#)

HR professionals can use these insights to attract talent and ensure the return to the office is compelling and aligned to a specific work objective.

¹ Benchmark With Gartner: Well-Being Crisis, Team Cohesion, Return to Office and Work-Life (23 September), n = 70.

2

AI creates, not diminishes, workforce opportunity

A Gartner survey found that 22% of employees expect AI to replace their job in the next five years. Despite the anxiety and significant discussion around how GenAI will impact jobs, in the short to medium term, GenAI will replace few jobs. Many jobs heavily impacted by GenAI will be redesigned. They will have new responsibilities including crafting prompts for GenAI tools and reviewing and applying the output of these tools.

The net-net is that GenAI will expand opportunities for the workforce, not reduce them. At the same time that implementing GenAI will create the need for new roles, it will also allow employers to reduce the time to a high proficiency with software and technology, easing the necessity of hiring talent already highly skilled in these areas. Gartner predicts that GenAI will play a role in 70% of text- and data-heavy tasks by 2025, up from less than 10% in 2023. The impact will be seen across organizations in various business units, including business operations, software development, sales, marketing, and customer service.

Executives should be prepared to iterate and adapt their plans and expectations for GenAI as tools evolve, roles and workflows change, and employee proficiency improves. At the moment, however, only one-third of employees report that their organization has communicated how its plans for using technology may impact their job in the future. Business leaders should work with HR to assess how GenAI investments should change their teams' roles and workflows and how best to communicate these messages to employees. HR can also assist with the impact on hiring — specifically, identifying which technical requirements and assessments are now unnecessary for open and upcoming roles and evaluating potential interview questions to assess talent against new skills needs.



Take Action:

[What Generative AI Means for Your Talent Strategy](#)

HR leaders should shape their talent strategies using a new framework for understanding generative AI's impact on the workforce.

3

Four-day workweeks go from radical to routine

A shift in the cadence of the workweek is underway. Previously considered a radical departure from the traditional five-day workweek, a four-day workweek (4DWW) has become a centerpiece of large-scale studies in performance, union negotiations and the preferences of many workers. In a recent Gartner survey, 63% of candidates rated “four-day workweek for the same pay” as the top new and innovative benefit that would attract them to a job.² With a talent shortage putting pressure on attracting and retaining employees, organizations are shifting toward flexible work models to meet growing employee demands.

Embracing a 4DWW will require organizations to rethink the cadence of the workweek. Not just in-office time, but all working time will need to be organized thoughtfully and with an eye toward getting the most out of the time employees are together. This means being more explicit about when focus-time is scheduled and when and where collaboration, brainstorming and feedback sessions take place. This intentional approach to time not only facilitates a 4DWW, it also allows organizations to benefit from shared expectations for when different types of tasks might be done, reducing the burden on managers and employees to manage up to set these expectations. Organizations that have implemented a 4DWW are experiencing business benefits. According to some studies, in addition to improving well-being, a 4DWW also increases employee performance and engagement.³ By reexamining the ways we work, organizations are identifying inefficiencies that can be improved, such as meeting management and administrative tasks.



Take Action:

[The Roadmap to Implementing a Four-Day Workweek](#)

HR leaders can use this guidance to learn how to implement a crawl-walk-run four-day workweek plan.

² 2022 Gartner Candidate Survey, n = 3,621.

³ 2023 Gartner Achieving High Performance Employee Survey, n = 139.

4

Employee conflict resolution is the new must-have skill for managers

There is an astonishing amount of potential for employee conflict currently, including geopolitical crises, labor strikes, climate change, pushback to DEI efforts, and upcoming elections for half of the globe. As ideological tensions intensify, only 26% of employees say that members of their team share similar opinions on socio-political issues.⁴ Conflict between employees at all levels will significantly damage both individual and team performance. This performance impact will have a long tail, as many conflicts directly tie to how people see themselves and will cast a shadow on interpersonal relationships between employees that stretches far longer than 2024 itself.

Gartner found that 57% of managers say they are fully responsible for managing conflicts for their direct reports.⁵ Managers who can effectively navigate and manage interpersonal conflict among employees, both overt and covert, will have an outside positive impact on their organizations. But how many really feel trained and prepared to do so? Conflict resolution is not about suppressing dissent or banning conversations about contentious topics. It requires actively working through challenging moments, pulling employees back from ostracizing colleagues with opposing viewpoints to focus on areas of mutual respect, or at least neutrality, and ensuring that as employees navigate global crises the potential impact of these crises is recognized, not just in internal communication but also in flexible expectations.

Successfully navigating a polarizing work environment that requires managers to be increasingly adept at conflict resolution presents a major challenge for many organizations. Organizations that have tried to avoid contentious topics may start this process behind the curve, particularly as conflict resolution is not an intuitive skill. To help managers approach situations with empathy, organizations should consider incorporating dedicated conflict management trainings, creating shadowing and coaching opportunities for new managers to see how experienced leaders resolve employee conflicts, and finding ways to recognize and reward effective conflict resolution at all levels of the organization.



Take Action:

[Evolve Culture and Leadership for the Hybrid World](#)

Leverage this 12-month roadmap to help reshape culture and leadership for a sustainable hybrid workplace.

⁴ 2022 Gartner Leadership Success in the New Environment Employee Survey, n = 3,392.

⁵ 2023 Gartner Building an Organization of Great Managers Manager Survey, n = 3,186.

5

GenAI experiments will yield hard lessons and painful costs

According to the 2023 Gartner Hype Cycle for Emerging Technologies, generative AI has already reached the Peak of Inflated Expectations, and will next enter the Trough of Disillusionment — a two- to five-year period during which it won't live up to overinflated expectations. This doesn't mean that GenAI won't be successful in solving business challenges or provide significant benefits; it means that the work gets harder from here. Enthusiasm, hype and a strong fear of missing out or being left behind are driving executives to push for the implementation of GenAI within their teams and organizations. However, without sufficient risk management, GenAI deployment will likely yield hard lessons and painful costs at many organizations.

Even organizations not implementing stand-alone GenAI-based tools will likely be deploying GenAI-enabled assistants or copilots as part of their existing technology stack. Most of these tools are being deployed with promises of incredible productivity returns if organizations apply them to their internal data and documents. However, these internal documents and files come with a major risk. Access and file classification policies have long been minimally observed, if not neglected, at most organizations. When GenAI-enabled assistants are deployed against an organization's internal files, this could mean that an employee can ask the assistant "Who filed harassment complaints in the last year?" or "What are the salaries and bonuses for everyone VP and above?" and get an answer.

In addition to the issues of governance, the output of GenAI is not infallible, creating a strong need for quality control and good employee judgment. Organizations will need to assign explicit responsibilities for quality control or they will risk significant reputational, regulatory and legal issues.

These risks don't outweigh the potential benefits of GenAI in general, or even GenAI deployed against an organization's internal documents, but they do require organizations to actively manage them. Regardless of whether an organization has officially permitted the use of GenAI, or where they are in implementation, leaders should ensure their teams have access to training to develop judgment around not just information validity, but also how and when to use GenAI.



Take Action:

[AI in HR: A Guide to Implementing AI in Your HR Organization](#)

Use this guidance to understand the value of AI solutions and plan for the impact they will have on the HR function and workforce.

6

Skills overtake degrees as the paper ceiling crumbles

College degrees are the top requirement of yesterday's job descriptions — not tomorrow's. Organizations today are increasingly shredding the paper ceiling — the invisible barrier workers without degrees face — and embracing skills-based hiring,⁶ even for some corporate jobs long considered degree-dependent. Major companies, including Google, Delta Airlines, Zoho and Accenture, have already removed many of their degree requirements from job postings to attract qualified talent without arbitrarily limiting themselves. State and local governments are also embracing this approach globally. This allows organizations to achieve the same results but hire from a much broader talent pool that includes both internally developed talent and workers Skilled Through Alternative Routes (STARs).⁷ These STARs — veterans, underrepresented talent and other skilled workers without college degrees — represent a major portion of the global workforce.

This shift is both a response to the tight labor market and a preemptive adjustment to a longer-term reality — with undergraduate degree completion rates declining, employers must consider new avenues to find or build the talent they need. Organizations like Target, Amazon and EY increasingly tout their in-house universities and business schools as tailored credential programs that prepare talent with the specific skills they'll need to advance. Siemens, IBM, HP and other companies have expanded their registered apprenticeship programs in the U.S., while in the EU there has been a rise in shared apprenticeship programs where smaller organizations that cannot meet the training requirements alone share apprentices to create a complete program for training talent with the target skills.



Take Action:

3 Best Practices for Sourcing Underrepresented Talent

Utilize these insights to build an effective diversity recruitment strategy that removes hiring process barriers and increases workforce representation.

^{6,7} <https://www.teartheperceiling.org/>



Climate change protection becomes the new in-demand employee benefit

The past year brought new visibility to how climate change impacts workforces worldwide. Employees struggled with crippling heat waves in Europe, flash floods in India and wildfire smoke in the U.S. and Canada — all threats to physical safety, material security and long-term emotional health. More employees worked from offices with air conditioning during recent summer heat events in London. Over 40% of European organizations provided discount schemes or adjusted pay to offset energy price spikes during the winter of 2022.

As severe climate change-related events shift from localized and episodic to widespread and persistent, executives will find new ways to navigate the impact on employee productivity, retention and recruitment. Organizations will seize the opportunity to make their response plans and support more explicit and transparent to enhance their employment value proposition.

In 2024 and beyond, organizations will highlight and promote direct climate change protections as a key part of their benefit offerings. These might include:

- Explicit commitments to physical safety. Organizations may develop proactive plans to offer shelter, energy and provisions when natural disasters arrive. Though many organizations built some of this infrastructure during the pandemic or in response to recent weather events, the most aggressive will actively and transparently communicate their response capabilities to their workforces.
- Compensation to impacted employees. Organizations may offer designated PTO or monetary benefits to those who experience hardship due to climate-related events. Subsidies for short-term housing, relocation assistance, disaster-related leave, or stipends for specialized safety equipment could become more explicit components of organizations' benefits packages.
- Mental health support. While many organizations have already expanded emotional well-being offerings, some may begin to offer access to grief counselors to help their workforces worldwide cope with the uncertainty of a changing climate.

These benefits will be particularly impactful for organizations with localized operations or a limited number of locations, where most, if not all, of their operations will stall in the event of disaster.



Take Action:

[How Major Shocks Affect Employees — and How You Can Support Them](#)

HR leaders can leverage this guidance to develop a plan to support employees, communicate key information and plan for the future.



DEI doesn't disappear, it becomes the way we work

After a flood of corporate attention in 2020, the past couple of years have seen a growing sense of disillusionment with DEI. In some places — the U.S. in particular — there's even a sense of direct pushback. Two in five employees report feeling alienated by their organization's DEI strategy.⁸ But the critical need for diverse, equitable and inclusive workforces remains, leaving organizations uncertain about what to do next.

Given the leadership commitment to DEI programs and initiatives, companies will begin to pivot from DEI existing in a silo to having it embedded throughout the organization. This new approach will change how business leaders interact with DEI, positioning it not as “what” they do, but “how” they achieve high performance in their key objectives. This “embedded DEI” model will unlock this potential, with the long-term goal of fully integrating DEI values into business objectives, daily operations and culture across an organization.

DEI leaders will directly consult with functional leaders, employing a DEI lens to co-create solutions to their most pressing challenges. With this paradigm shift, procurement leaders, for example, will see DEI as a critical part of their strategy to maximize impact in sourcing suppliers, while product managers will emphasize which demographic populations comprised market research and whether their technology is accessible for people with disabilities. In this new model, DEI shifts from a dedicated function to a shared way of working as leaders leverage DEI principles to pursue their top strategic goals as a matter of course, because of the clear and personally relevant business value more diverse, equitable and inclusive organizations produce.



Take Action:

[2023 ReimagineHR Conference Presentation: Think Like a CFO: How DEI Leaders Can Lead With Authority and Manage Diversity](#)

Use this ReimagineHR Conference deep-dive presentation to develop a plan to lead and manage DEI more effectively amid uncertainty.

⁸ 2021 Gartner Human Deal Benchmarking Survey, n = 5,000.

9

Career stereotypes collapse in the face of workforce change

Careers used to be defined by promotion-based progression and increasing specialization until retirement. But not anymore. Many employees prefer not to retire at all or do so after a career shift that may involve less lucrative work. Many midcareer employees are stepping out of the permanent workforce, taking a break or embracing contingent work. Notably, in 2023, more than a quarter of surveyed employees said they would like to make a significant change to their current work circumstances such as working in a new industry or changing careers.⁹

Employees also face involuntary career disruptions due to economic cycles, natural disasters and emerging technologies. As atypical career paths go mainstream, the stereotypes that underpin most organizations' talent management strategies will be detrimental to talent acquisition and retention. Organizations must adapt to these changes by:

- Breaking the stereotype of career continuity by offering nontraditional employment models and opportunities. This includes bringing back retired employees as gig workers or mentors and facilitating temporary workforce departures with midcareer leave programs and returnships. Goldman Sachs and Johnson & Johnson provide returnships for people reentering the workforce.
- Letting go of the progressive career trajectory by decoupling expertise and tenure. Think of young employees taking on leadership roles because of their expertise in niche terrains, or tenured professionals taking up internships in their areas of interest. T-Mobile targets high school students with an aptitude for cybersecurity with its Explorer Prep Program.
- Preparing for the imminent retirement of experienced workers by cross-training young and midcareer employees. Organizations should increasingly offer internal rotation so that anyone can train in a new subject, and create shadowing opportunities so that experienced workers can help develop expertise in less tenured colleagues. Tetra Pak uses a rotation program, where nearly half of each product team is reshuffled every 18 months based on new skills they wish to learn.



Take Action:

Career Pathing Should Be Like Satellite Navigation, Not a Map


Use this actionable guidance to help develop compelling career paths to attract and retain talent while supporting internal employee development.

⁹ 2023 Gartner Modern Employee Experience and Manager Development Survey, n = 3,493.

Despite the historic uncertainty in 2024, CHROs have an exciting opportunity to boldly lead talent into the future and differentiate their organizations as employers of choice. HR leaders should proactively consider and integrate these trends into their strategic planning if they wish to close talent gaps, minimize potential risk, control conflict and achieve strong workforce performance.


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