

Centre for the New Economy and Society

Chief People Officers Outlook

September 2025



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September 2025

This briefing builds on the latest global workforce research as well as consultations and surveys with leading chief people officers, organized by the World Economic Forum's Centre for the New Economy and Society. It aims to summarize the current labour market and talent strategy environment and identify priorities for responsible leadership, global alignment and action in response to ongoing workforce transformation, technological disruptions and geoeconomic events.

The survey featured in this briefing was conducted between May and June 2025.

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Executive summary

Based on a mid-2025 survey and consultations with the World Economic Forum's community of more than 130 chief people officers, this *Chief People Officers Outlook* highlights the increasingly strategic role played by the people function in shaping organizational resilience and business transformation and growth.

Chief people officers perceive short-term labour market caution amid long-term opportunities for workforce transformation. Top workforce strategy priorities for the year ahead include revising organizational structures, fostering culture and purpose, and advancing workforce artificial intelligence

(AI) deployment. Opportunities related to AI specifically include job augmentation and redesign, career development, workflow enhancement and upskilling. However, risks such as skill atrophy persist. Human-centred workforce AI deployment is essential.

Success in navigating disruption and driving inclusive, adaptive and tech-enabled work environments will increasingly depend on core competencies such as business acumen, digital fluency and stakeholder influence within the people function. This will position people leadership as central to future business success.

Introduction: A front-seat perspective on workforce transformation

Labour markets and the world of work continue to evolve rapidly while uncertainty about the future remains high. Geoeconomic upheavals, artificial intelligence (AI) and other significant trends have created uncharted territory for organizations' workforce planning, as well as national and global talent strategies.

Against this backdrop, this inaugural *Chief People Officers Outlook* aims to provide a labour market pulse check and a forward-looking perspective to support workforce preparedness. It is shaped by the collective

insights of the World Economic Forum's community of more than 130 chief people officers at global employers across regions and industries, and is intended to be a timely reference not only for global peers and people leaders, but also for the broader C-suite, policy-makers, labour market researchers and others working towards a future of work that works for all (see Box 1).

The findings in this edition are based on a survey conducted between May and June 2025, supplemented by thematic interviews and community consultations.¹

Box 1: The growing strategic impact of chief people officers

The role of the chief people officer is becoming increasingly strategic. Today's chief people officers are central to driving organizational resilience, business transformation and workforce readiness. The people function is now widely recognized as a core driver of business growth, with the large majority of chief people officers surveyed for this briefing stating that their organizations rely on them to actively co-drive and co-design company direction. Nearly all confirm that the people function is seen as a strategic driver of business value within their organizations (Figure 1). Among leading organizations, the increasing executive integration of the people function further underscores its growing influence in shaping business success.

Figure 1. People function currently seen as strategic driver of business value

Share of chief people officers surveyed, where 1 = "Not at all" and 7 = "To a great extent"



Source: Chief People Officers Survey. (May-June 2025).

¹ The methodological approach of this briefing is inspired by the World Economic Forum's Chief Economists Outlook series, see: World Economic Forum (2025a).

1. Talent and economy outlook

Global 12-month talent outlook

Short-term caution, long-term transformation

The mid-2025 labour market outlook reflects widespread short-term caution. When asked about their expectations for the labour market for the year ahead, chief people officers show no clear consensus. The overall outlook is static: 42% expect no change, with the remainder split between somewhat weaker or somewhat stronger.

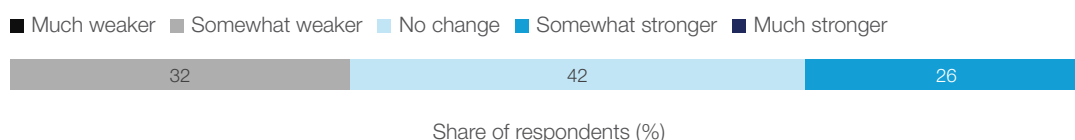
This points to caution, illustrated by low vacancy and quit rates, which are currently well below recent peaks, specifically in the United States² but also globally.

According to the chief people officers consulted for this briefing, many organizations are delaying hiring or restructuring decisions as they assess an evolving landscape and navigate macroeconomic volatility, geopolitical tensions and rapid technological transformation.

While caution defines the current outlook, workforce transformation remains the longer-term imperative for many organizations. Chief people officers emphasized the need to invest in longer-term change to navigate continued disruption and ensure organizational resilience and success. In many organizations, the people function is seen as playing a central role in designing and driving this transformation.

Figure 2. Expectation for the labour market condition over the next 6-12 months

Share of chief people officers surveyed



Source: Chief People Officers Survey. (May-June 2025).



Caution is the current setting – but transformation is the long-term opportunity.

Chief people officer perspective

² Indeed Hiring Lab. (2025); United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025).

Regional 12-month talent outlook

Talent scarcity and strategic workforce shifts

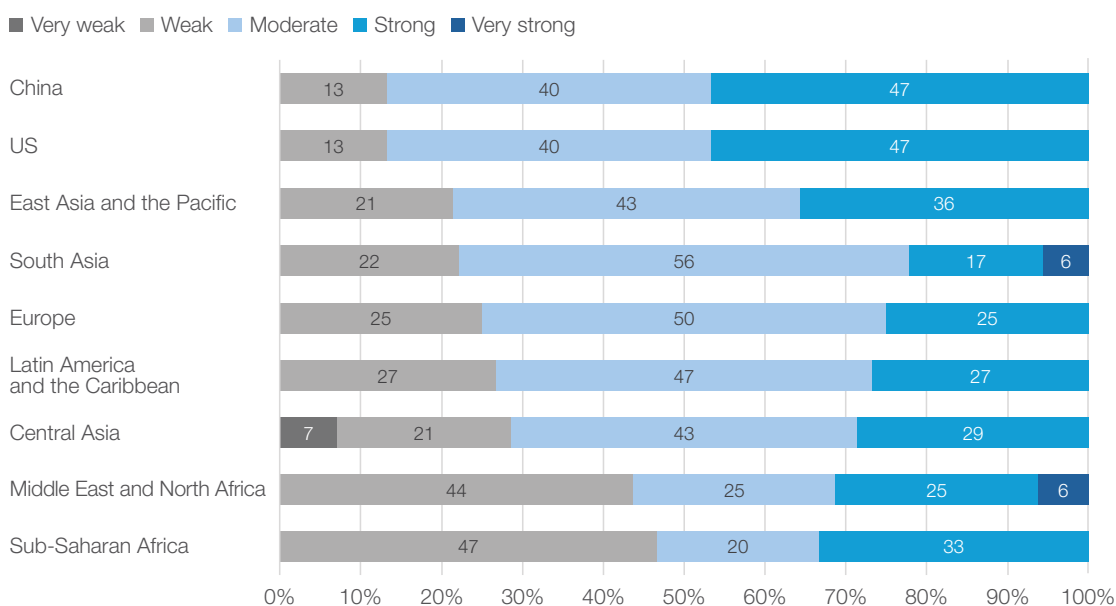
In a fragmented geopolitical and economic landscape, talent availability and distribution are especially complex. Many countries are developing national talent strategies to attract skilled workers or position themselves as talent hubs. At the same time, global employers are responding by adopting more agile workforce models.

Chief people officers consulted for this briefing stressed the importance of skilling and forward-looking talent strategies in this current complex context. They pointed to the potential of global, flexible work models – built on remote or hybrid operations, distributed teams and cross-border collaboration – as key levers for strategic advantage.

Figure 3 displays chief people officers' mid-2025 expectations for talent availability across regions over the next year.

Figure 3. Expectation for the state of talent availability (6-12 months)

Share of chief people officers surveyed



Source: Chief People Officers Survey. (May-June 2025).



In the current environment, workforce resilience stems from global, not just local, talent strategies.

Chief people officer perspective

Adapting to a changing workforce

New priorities, new tensions

Chief people officers consulted for this briefing pointed to shifting workforce expectations as an influential factor shaping talent strategies in mid-2025. Today's workers – especially younger generations – are seen to be entering and navigating the labour market with new priorities and expectations, particularly focused on flexibility and purpose.

As one chief people officer observed, “today's talent is confident, well informed and unapologetically selective. They're clear about what they want and willing to walk away from what doesn't serve them.”

While expectations evolve, low vacancy rates in many regions and industries

create a talent landscape marked by both increased agency and growing precarity.

Beyond individual preferences, chief people officers consulted for this briefing observe deeper social and psychological shifts affecting the workplace. They cite:

- Rising mental health concerns
- Growing value polarization within the workplace

Technology is perceived as continuing to amplify these trends, changing how people work, communicate and connect with organizations. In response, some people leaders are calling for a renewed emphasis on collective values, re-establishing shared purpose and team cohesion.



The current challenge is to actively reinforce cohesion and company culture in increasingly diverse, fragmented and digitally mediated workplaces to sustain engagement and performance.

Chief people officer perspective

2. Talent and technology outlook

Current workforce AI integration priorities

Mapping early AI impact

AI is top of mind for people leaders. Figure 4 sets out surveyed chief people officers' priorities in relation to workforce deployment of AI and automation over the next 6-12 months.

Collaborating with technical departments was ranked among the top three priorities by 59% of respondents. Equally prioritized

was mapping the impact of AI on people, jobs, tasks and processes – highlighting a shared commitment to understanding how AI is reshaping work at different levels.

Proactively redesigning jobs, tasks and processes ranks third. As AI tools become more embedded in daily operations, chief people officers consulted for this briefing emphasize the importance of evolving traditional job structures. This points to a broader view of AI not just as a tool, but as a catalyst for more fundamental workforce transformations.

Figure 4. Ranking of priorities in relation to workforce deployment of AI and process automation technology in the next 6-12 months

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Collaborating with technical departments in designing and deploying AI tools and policies |
| 2 | Mapping the impact of AI on people, jobs, tasks and processes |
| 3 | Proactively redesigning jobs, tasks and processes |
| 4 | Developing upskilling and reskilling programmes |
| 5 | Hiring new, specialized talent with skills to work alongside, or design, AI tools |
| 6 | Facilitating talent redeployment and internal mobility |
| 7 | Leading the design and execution of change management programmes |
| 8 | Measuring productivity and performance changes |
| 9 | Managing workforce downsizing in obsolete roles |

Source: Chief People Officers Survey. (May-June 2025).

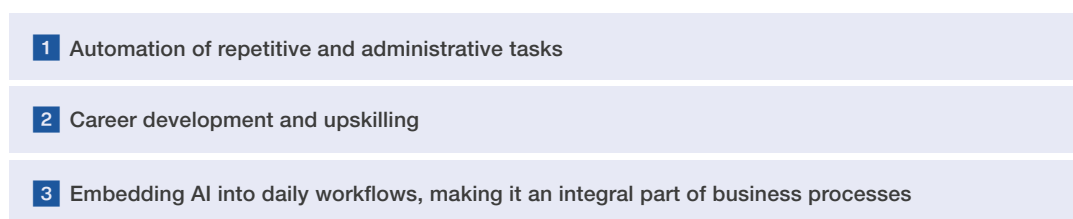
While mid-2025 workforce AI integration priorities identified by chief people officers highlight a near-term focus on implementation, research with a longer-term timeframe indicates that employers plan to broaden their AI strategies over the next five years, to include hiring AI-specialized talent, workforce reskilling and restructuring roles. This reflects a growing recognition that, as AI adoption accelerates and its implications become clearer, talent strategies need to evolve in parallel.³

Navigating risks and opportunities

Strategic AI integration

Figure 5 sets out opportunities chief people officers identified in relation to workforce AI deployment and automation over the next 6-12 months. The most frequently cited opportunity is the automation of repetitive and administrative tasks, followed by opportunities for career development and upskilling. A third key area is the integration of AI into daily workflows, embedding it more deeply into core business processes.

Figure 5. Top opportunities in relation to workforce deployment of AI and process automation technology in the next 6-12 months



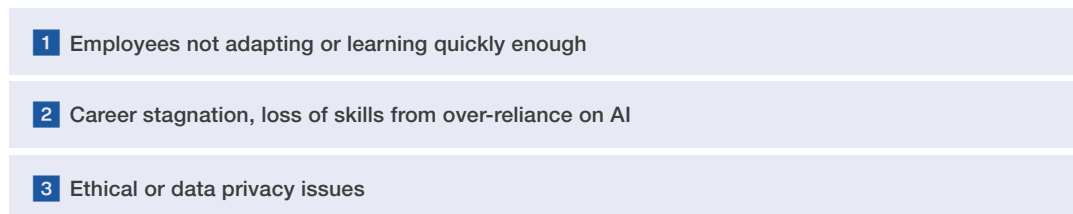
Source: Chief People Officers Survey. (May-June 2025).

Chief people officers consulted for this briefing noted that AI should not be seen to be only about efficiency – it can also improve work quality. Reducing repetitive tasks frees up time, while embedding AI into workflows can elevate decision-making, productivity and overall efficiency.

Despite optimism around AI deployment, chief people officers also highlighted several near-term risks for their workforce (Figure 6). The top concern is that employees may not adapt or upskill quickly enough to keep pace with new technologies. This is followed by fears of career stagnation and skill atrophy due to over-reliance on AI. Ethical and data privacy concerns rank third.

³ World Economic Forum. (2025b); World Economic Forum. (2024).

Figure 6. Top risks in relation to workforce deployment of AI and process automation technology in the next 6-12 months



Source: Chief People Officers Survey. (May-June 2025).

Chief people officers caution that AI-led transformation without adequate support could deepen existing workforce disparities. Workers may struggle to adapt risk displacement, while others may face reduced agency or limited career progression as AI takes on more decision-making responsibilities. Ethical risks – especially around data use in hiring or evaluations – were also raised.

Many chief people officers consulted for this briefing emphasized the importance of aligning workforce AI deployment with a long-term vision – grounded in clear business goals and workforce strategies – while maintaining a human-centred approach. Failing to do so could lead to missed opportunities for large-scale transformation and erode trust in both leadership and the technology itself.



Successful workforce AI integration will depend not only on effective technical deployment, but also on a deliberate redesign of work and a firm commitment to human-centred implementation.

Chief people officer perspective

3. People strategy amid disruption

Global 12-month workforce strategy outlook

Current priorities on the people agenda

When asked which people practices are being prioritized by organizations in mid-2025 for the year ahead, a clear top three (across a comprehensive range of response options) emerged among surveyed chief people officers:

1. Review organizational structure and job design
2. Focus on workplace culture and articulating business purpose and impact
3. Support workforce deployment of AI and process automation

Reviewing organizational structure and job design ranked highest, with 53% of respondents placing it in their top three and 21% choosing it as their number one priority.

A focus on workplace culture and business purpose came close behind, with over half of respondents listing it as a top-three priority. Chief people officers consulted for this briefing highlighted that workplace culture is often first addressed by evolving leadership models. Empowering the next generation of leaders is seen as crucial for fostering resilience and navigating disruption.

Supporting workforce deployment of AI and process automation was also ranked in the top three by 47% of respondents, reflecting its importance as a transformative force reshaping work.

Leading through change

Key capabilities for delivering people strategies

Surveyed chief people officers identify several key required competencies for the people function to deliver on today's priorities.

Chief people officers overwhelmingly pointed to **business acumen and strategic thinking**, followed by **stakeholder influence** and **digital fluency and data literacy**, as key success factors for the chief people officer of the future. In fact, 100% of respondents ranked business acumen and strategic thinking in their top three success factors, with nearly 90% ranking it as their top priority. As one chief people officer states: "You can't separate people and business anymore." Many chief people officers consulted for this briefing also acknowledged a capability gap in digital and data skills across the people function. Closing this gap was seen as essential to increasing the people function's strategic influence and impact across the business.

Conclusion

Geopolitical and economic volatility, rapid technological advances, shifting demographics and evolving worker expectations are reshaping labour markets.

The data and perspectives shared in this briefing point to where change is headed – organizations are rethinking their organizational structures, cultures and job design while prioritizing workforce integration of AI. Although this transition

is complex, it presents an opportunity to build a more resilient, inclusive and agile world of work.

Realizing this opportunity will require sustained collaboration, innovation and a shared agenda among all stakeholders. This is not just a time for adaptation – it is a time for redesign, and chief people officers are increasingly seen as having a critical role to play in shaping and enabling the transitions ahead.

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Contributors

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