Gartner

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Ambitious growth goals in a VUCA environment put pressure on talent strategies

Regardless of headwinds, CEOs are still prioritizing growth, with talent, people management and culture as their top challenges to lead and grow.

As the pressure for growth mounts, CHROs must develop a robust talent strategy that steers organizations through the current volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (VUCA) headwinds and fuels growth. This guide shares best practices across four initiatives to shape an effective talent strategy.

1. **Deliver current and emerging skills needs.**

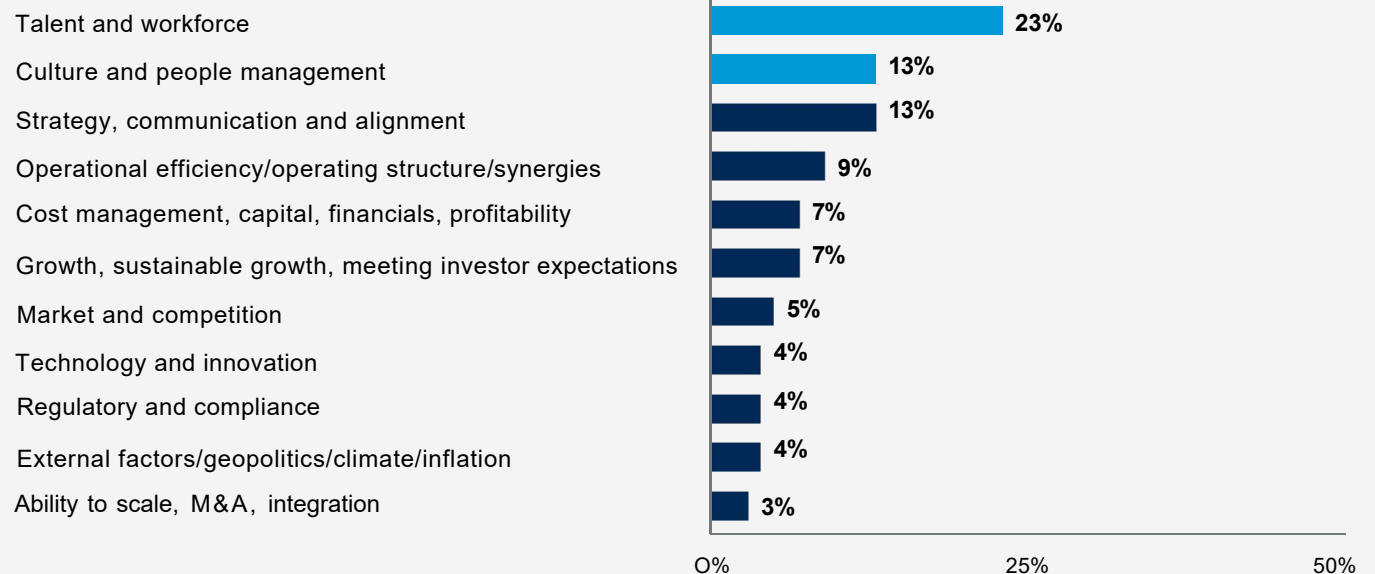2. **Develop transformation leaders and managers.**

3. **Sustain workforce morale through transformation.**

4. **Enable the growth of the human/tech augmented workforce.**

CEOs' most critical challenges when leading, growing and scaling the enterprise
Coded responses

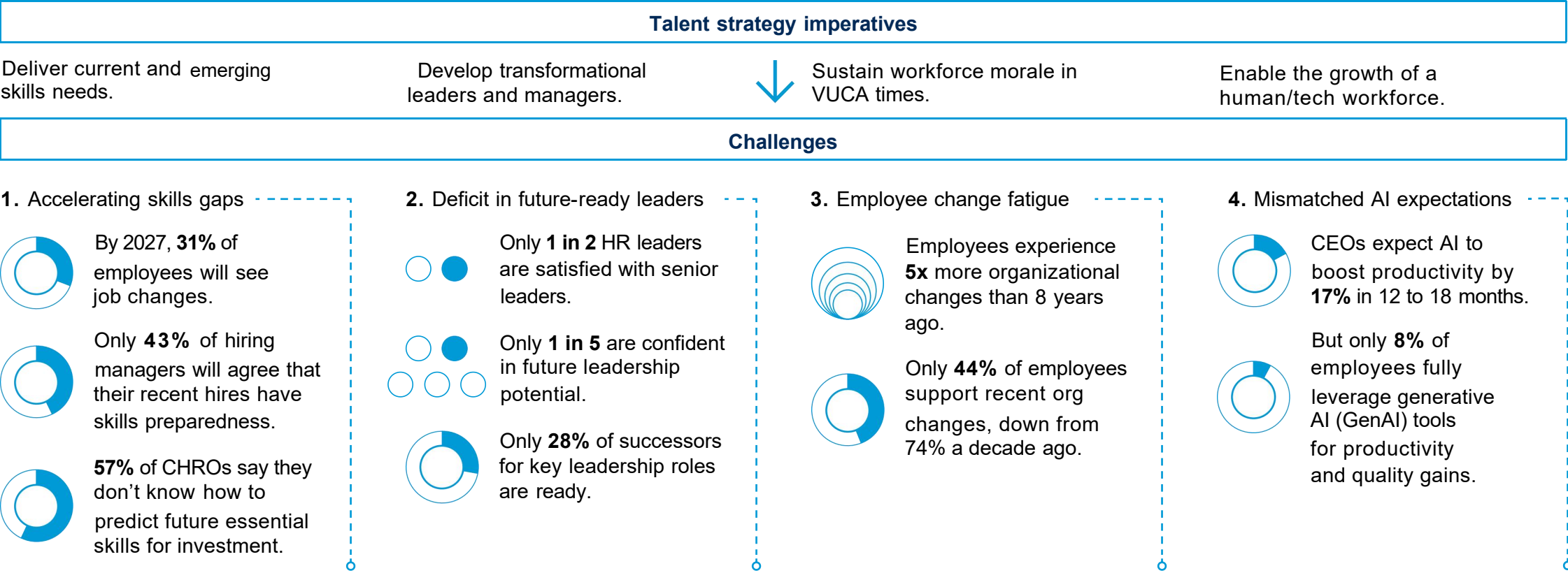| Challenge	Percentage
Talent and workforce	23%
Culture and people management	13%
Strategy, communication and alignment	13%
Operational efficiency/operating structure/synergies	9%
Cost management, capital, financials, profitability	7%
Growth, sustainable growth, meeting investor expectations	7%
Market and competition	5%
Technology and innovation	4%
Regulatory and compliance	4%
External factors/geopolitics/climate/inflation	4%
Ability to scale, M&A, integration	3%

n = 456, all respondents
Q. What are the two most critical challenges you face when leading and growing a large-scale organization?
Source: 2025 Gartner CEO and Senior Business Executive Survey

# Challenges that make it difficult to develop an effective talent strategy in 2025

Talent strategy imperatives

Deliver current and emerging skills needs.

Develop transformational leaders and managers.

Sustain workforce morale in VUCA times.

Enable the growth of a human/tech workforce.

Challenges

1. Accelerating skills gaps

By 2027, **31%** of employees will see job changes.

Only **43%** of hiring managers will agree that their recent hires have skills preparedness.

57% of CHROs say they don't know how to predict future essential skills for investment.

2. Deficit in future-ready leaders

Only **1 in 2** HR leaders are satisfied with senior leaders.

Only **1 in 5** are confident in future leadership potential.

Only **28%** of successors for key leadership roles are ready.

3. Employee change fatigue

Employees experience **5x** more organizational changes than 8 years ago.

Only **44%** of employees support recent org changes, down from 74% a decade ago.

4. Mismatched AI expectations

CEOs expect AI to boost productivity by **17%** in 12 to 18 months.

But only **8%** of employees fully leverage generative AI (GenAI) tools for productivity and quality gains.

Source: Gartner

How do we close skills gaps and anticipate future skills needs?

CEOs and boards identify talent shortages as the primary risk to growth strategies, increasing pressure on CHROs to effectively equip their organizations with future-ready skills. As roles and skill requirements evolve, CHROs must guide talent leaders in pinpointing and investing in crucial workforce capabilities to meet long-term strategic goals. However, CHROs often struggle to prioritize time and investments effectively in a rapidly changing, complex and uncertain environment.

"We don't know how to predict which skills will be important to invest in for the future."
Percentage of CHROs

25%
Disagree

19%
Neutral

57%
Agree
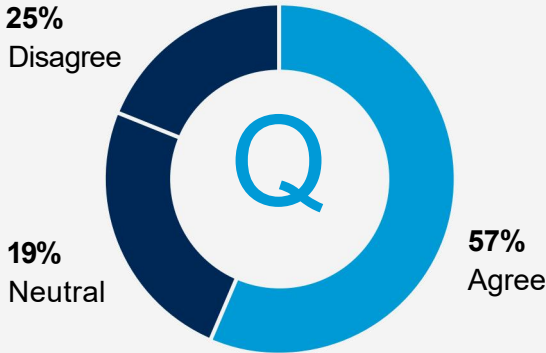
n = 242 CHROs
Gartner 2025 HR Priorities Survey

Gartner Answer

# Leverage targeted strategic workforce planning

In 2025's VUCA environment, CHROs must guide strategic workforce planning (SWP) efforts to target the most acute skill risks to strategic objectives. By doing so, CHROs can help talent management leaders make tough trade-offs and prioritize the most critical investments in skills intelligence and solutions to close capability gaps.

Targeted SWP investments
Impact on talent readiness
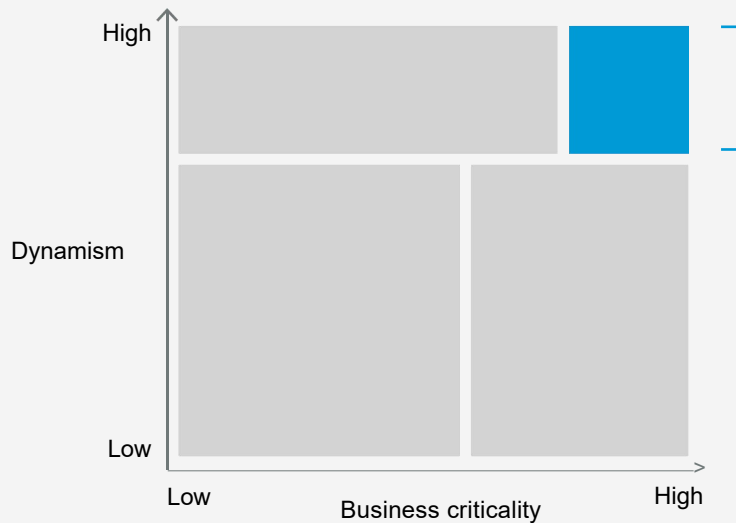
Concentrating skills intelligence investments on a **small set of roles** with **high business criticality and dynamism.**

▲ **+10%** on talent readiness*

Source: Gartner

*Talent readiness is defined as the workforce's ability to respond to changing business needs whenever and however they come.

3 steps to initiate SWP:

1. Define roles and responsibilities for better collaboration.

2. Narrow the plan's scope to avoid complexity.

3. Promote flexibility through regular reviews and adaptability.

Your peers in action:

Wolters Kluwer

Wolters Kluwer

Wolters Kluwer's HR team employs a targeted SWP strategy focusing on "dynamic" jobs. Instead of questioning "if" a job is changing, they ask "how" and "how much." They found that 25% of roles are "dynamic" (changing in tasks and outcomes), while 75% are "steady" (methods change, but the job itself remains constant).
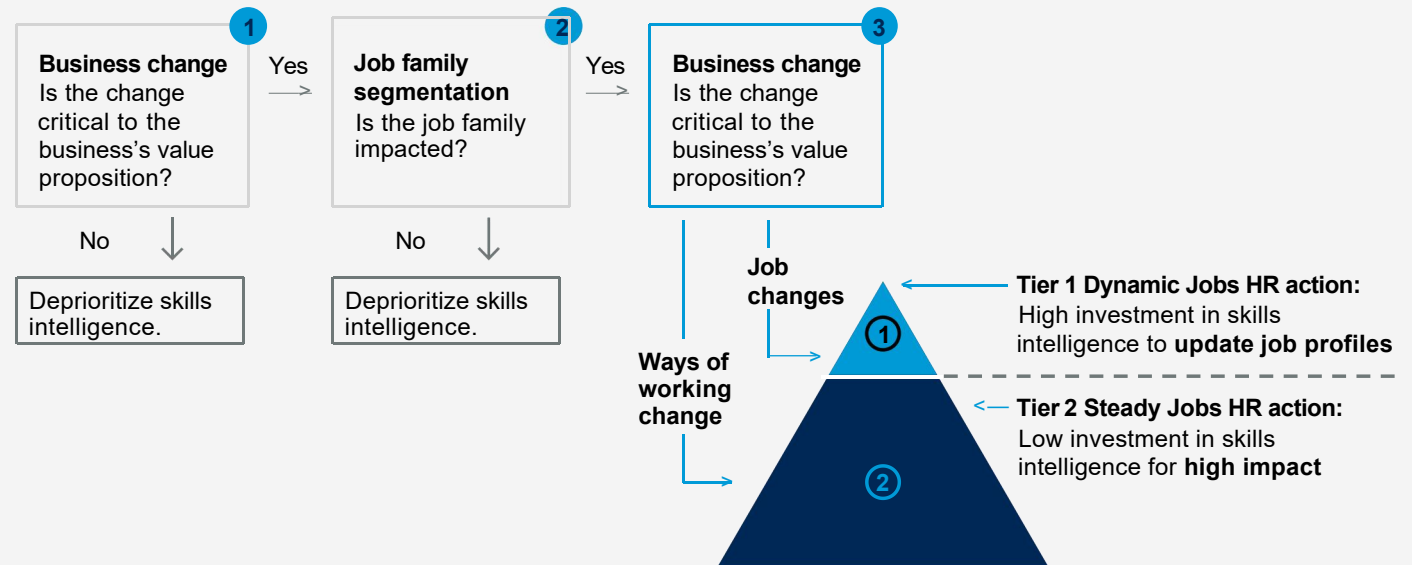
By focusing their SWP efforts on "dynamic" jobs, the Wolters Kluwer team is able to make more timely and impactful build, buy, borrow investments.

Gartner clients can access additional SWP case studies on the client portal.

Learn more about becoming a Gartner client today.

Wolters Kluwer's job impact tier decision tree

1 **Business change**
Is the change critical to the business's value proposition?

Yes →

2 **Job family segmentation**
Is the job family impacted?

Yes →

3 **Business change**
Is the change critical to the business's value proposition?

No ↓

Deprioritize skills intelligence.

No ↓

Deprioritize skills intelligence.

Job changes

Ways of working change

Tier 1 Dynamic Jobs HR action:
High investment in skills intelligence to **update job profiles**

Tier 2 Steady Jobs HR action:
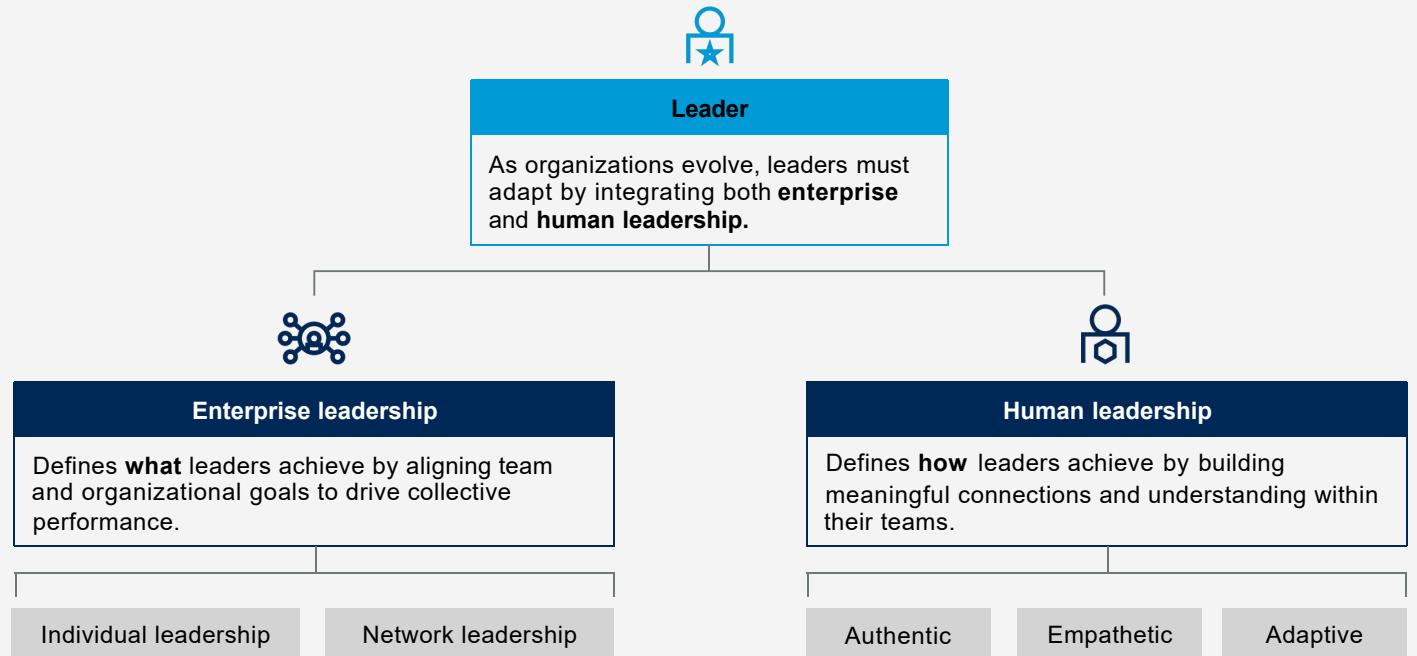Low investment in skills intelligence for **high impact**

Adapted from Wolters Kluwer

How do we prepare rising leaders for an uncertain future?

Gartner research highlights the need for human and enterprise leadership, yet HR leaders are less clear on how to get that leadership. Although 76% of organizations have significantly revised leadership programs recently, results are lacking. Only 36% of HR leaders feel their efforts prepare leaders for future challenges, and just 23% trust their organization's ability to develop emerging leaders for future demands.

Defining human leadership and enterprise leadership

Leader

As organizations evolve, leaders must adapt by integrating both **enterprise** and **human leadership.**

Enterprise leadership

Defines **what** leaders achieve by aligning team and organizational goals to drive collective performance.

Individual leadership   Network leadership

Human leadership

Defines **how** leaders achieve by building meaningful connections and understanding within their teams.

Authentic   Empathetic   Adaptive

Source: Gartner

Accelerate development using the 7 Gartner hallmarks

Gartner surveyed leaders and HR professionals to identify seven key hallmarks for accelerating leadership development. Once the C-suite agrees on essential leader skills and attributes, CHROs can enhance their leadership bench by assessing development programs against these hallmarks to pinpoint high-ROI improvements.

7 hallmarks of effective leadership

7. Facilitate visible self-investment for leaders

1. Reserve in-person development only for connection

2. Intersperse connection and training over time

6. Prioritize development support for high-risk, high-stakes moments

5. Build experiential learning into existing roles

3. Create diverse learning cohorts followed by reflection with "true peers"

4. Include hard accountability for application

Source: Gartner

Top moments where leaders need targeted development support:

1. Leading their team through a major organizational change.

2. Managing a high-risk situation.

3. Adapting in response to a significant change in their role expectations.

Your peers in action:

OCBC

OCBC integrates learning with peer engagement, letting learners drive over 70% of the agenda to enhance connections and development. L&D provides prompts before social interactions to guide discussions on common challenges. Time between learning and social events enables real-life application and challenge identification. Repeated social interactions after application periods foster trusted peer relationships and offer support in overcoming challenges.


Adapted from OCBC
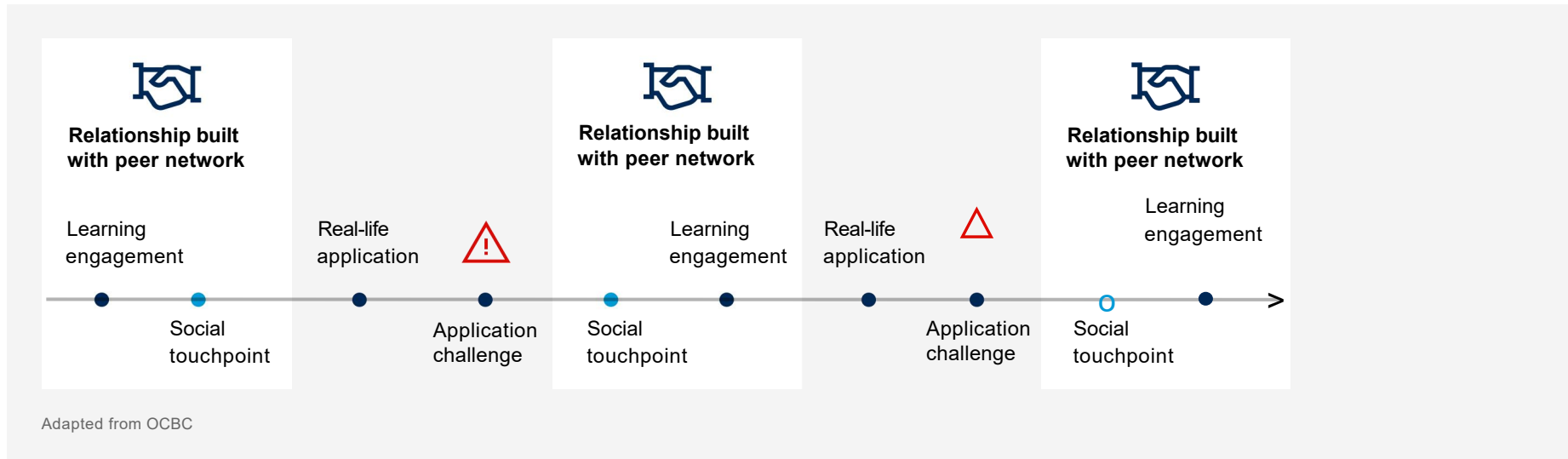
Key Challenge

How do we engage a change-fatigued workforce in growth initiatives?

Many organizations struggle with the dizzying speed of change and the related challenges in implementation and employee experience. Employees face significant shifts in a VUCA environment, undergoing an average of 13 enterprisewide changes annually — 5x more than eight years ago. Ambiguity, in particular, is 1.5x more likely to challenge employees than each of the other aspects of VUCA.

Stacked, constant changes cause workforce disruption and high change fatigue, reducing support for organizational change. Such an environment threatens the employee experience and key business outcomes, increasing risks of burnout, attrition and productivity loss.

Employees' willingness to support organizational change: 2016 vs. 2024

41% reduction in willingness to change
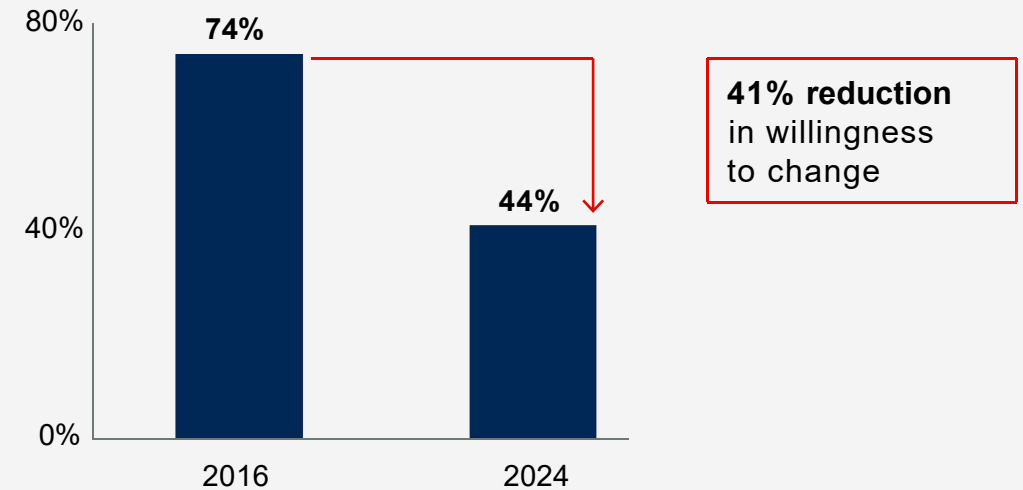
n = 6,686 employees; n = 3,529 employees
Source: 2016 Gartner Workforce Change Survey; Source: 2024 Gartner Organization Structure and Leadership Trust Survey

Gartner Answer

Involve employees in change processes to help navigate ambiguity

Instead of taking a top-down approach, HR leaders should make sure change happens with employees, not to them, in order to reduce attrition and change fatigue. By developing effective change leaders and empowering employees, CHROs can foster a culture that embraces new initiatives. Actively involving employees in the change process can transform it into a positive experience, benefiting the entire organization.

Leading a change-ready workforce

Prioritize change based on **impact and readiness**

Empower managers to **build change resilience**

Equip employees to be **change influencers**

Source: Gartner

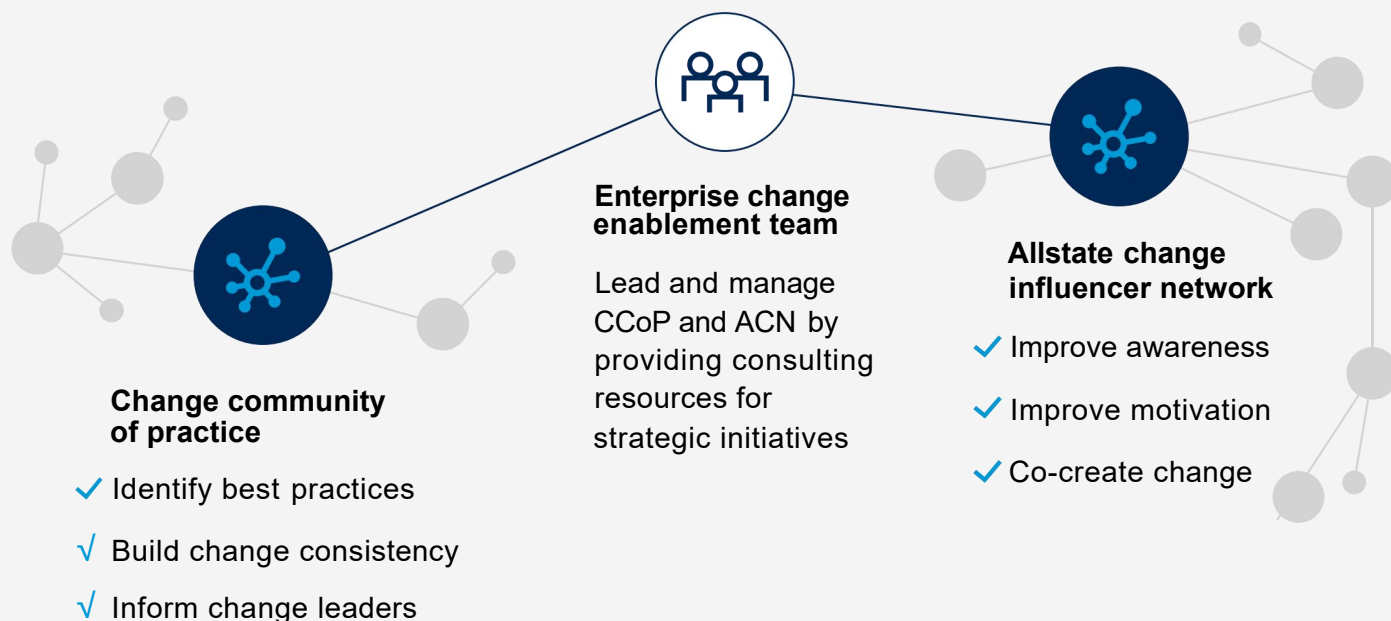## How to engage employees in change processes:

- Target key employee groups to support initiatives.

- Involve employees in planning and implementing.

- Encourage employees' questions and opinions, avoiding a top-down approach.

Allstate uses an enterprisewide change model to facilitate horizontal employee engagement, speeding up execution and adoption.

They identify "change influencers" with strong peer connections to discuss changes across forums. A network analysis helps find employees with broad networks of relationships to act as change influencers. Open nominations identify employees who are trusted sources for information and feedback on changes.

This network-driven approach enhances awareness and comfort with change. Allstate employees gain a better understanding of and confidence in their role as co-creators of the change, leading to increased engagement, advocacy and adoption.

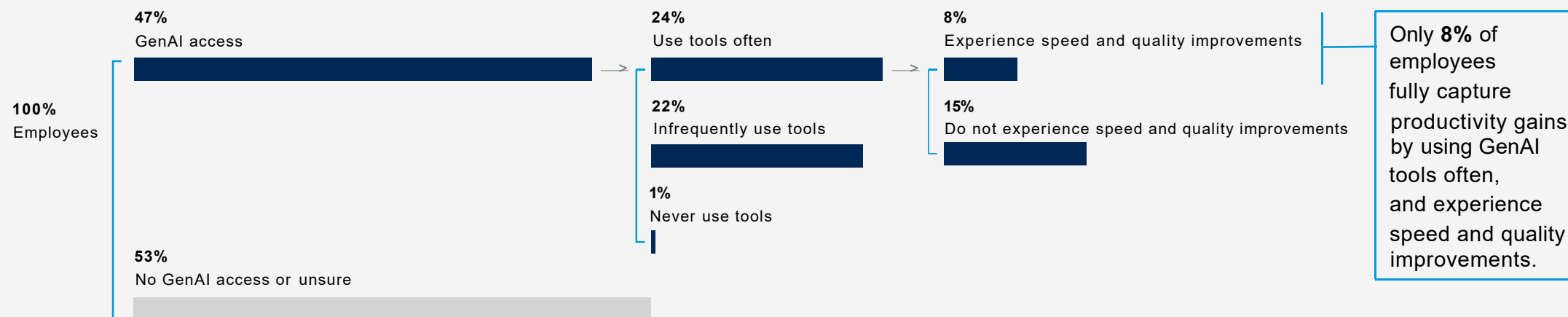## Network model for change planning and execution

Change community of practice

✓ Identify best practices

√ Build change consistency

√ Inform change leaders

Enterprise change enablement team

Lead and manage CCoP and ACN by providing consulting resources for strategic initiatives

Allstate change influencer network

✓ Improve awareness

✓ Improve motivation

✓ Co-create change

Adapted from Allstate

Key Challenge

How do we translate AI promise into productivity?

CEOs anticipate a 17% productivity boost from AI within 12 to 18 months, but most organizations face a significant gap between expectations and reality. CHROs and HR teams are crucial in strategizing to bridge this usage and productivity gap.

Access to, and frequent usage of, GenAI tools does not guarantee higher productivity

47%
GenAI access

24%
Use tools often

8%
Experience speed and quality improvements

100%
Employees

22%
Infrequently use tools

15%
Do not experience speed and quality improvements

1%
Never use tools

53%
No GenAI access or unsure

Only **8%** of employees fully capture productivity gains by using GenAI tools often, and experience speed and quality improvements.

n = 3,405 knowledge workers
Q. Which of the following are true about Generative AI tools that you use at work? Select all that apply.
Source: 2024 Gartner Redefining Productivity Employee Survey
Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Take a human-first AI approach

Executives often struggle to drive adoption of GenAI because they neglect its impact on employees. Only 14% of HR leaders say employees have a voice in technology decisions. To maximize AI's value and boost adoption and productivity, CHROs should guide HR leaders in adopting a human-first AI approach, ensuring employees feel comfortable and confident using it.

By taking a human-first AI approach, employees are **1.5x** more likely to be high performers and **2.3x** more likely to be engaged.
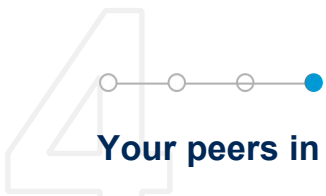
Source: Gartner

Actions to work with C-suite/HR leaders:

1. First, identify what employees are trying to accomplish and then how the tech can support them.

2. Prioritize initiatives based on productivity impact.

3. Find employee champions to lead the discovery of technology's impact on jobs.

4

Your peers in action:

Vizient

vizient.

AI becomes meaningful for the business when it becomes meaningful to employees. Vizient adopted a human-first approach by involving employees in creating their own empathy maps, gaining insights into their perspectives on AI's impact on their daily work and professional identity. Since employees' views on their work influence their behaviors, understanding these views is crucial for encouraging behavior changes needed to harness GenAI's value.

As a result of this human-first approach, Vizient saw a 3x increase in the number of employees trained in GenAI tools and a 2.5x increase in the number of employees using GenAI daily in their work.

Sam: Vizient's software engineer empathy map
Partial representation

Who is Sam? Sam is a software engineer in an agile team. His daily activities are centered around coding new features and maintaining existing code. He tackles a variety of tasks, from implementing new user story acceptance criteria to optimizing and refactoring the codebase.

What are Sam's goals? Learn and experiment with new technologies and methodologies.

How Sam spends his day	% of work
Coding/development	25%
Code reviews	10%
Refactoring	5%
Documentation	5%
Agile ceremonies and meetings	10%
Planning and design	10%
Problem solving/debugging	10%
Innovation time	10%
Admin time	15%

How will GenAI changeSam's day job?

- Sam will focus on higher-order design aspects, problem-solving instead of repetitive coding tasks.
- Sam should focus more on quality vs. code writing.

How will GenAI impact Sam's identity?

- Sam will have to identify tasks where he needs to be the "human-in-the-loop."
- From executor-of-code to enhancer-of-code.

How will GenAI shift Sam's work-life schedule?

Sam gets an hour a day back for personal development or personal time.

Adapted from Vizient

Impact of addressing the 4 talent strategy challenges

Talent strategy imperatives

Deliver current and emerging skills needs.

Develop transformational leaders and managers.

Sustain workforce morale in VUCA times.

Enable the growth of a human/tech workforce.

Challenges

Accelerating skills gaps

Deficit in future-ready leaders

Employee change fatigue

Mismatched AI expectations

Gartner solution

1. Targeted SWP

- ✓ **10%** increase in talent readiness

2. Seven hallmarks of leadership development

- ✓ Up to **2.4x** more likely to create enterprise leaders
- ✓ Up to **1.8x** more likely to create human leaders

3. Build a change-ready workforce

- ✓ Reduce change fatigue up to **29%**
- ✓ Increase willingness to change by **1.5x**

3. Human-first AI

- ✓ **2.5x** increase in the number of employees using GenAI daily in their work
- ✓ Employees **1.5x** more likely to be high performers and **2.3x** more likely to be engaged

Source: Gartner

How Gartner is helping HR leaders adapt and stay ahead

The decisions HR leaders make today can impact their organization's business outcomes and brand for years to come. It's critical to have trusted support. With our insight, actionable tools and guidance, we help HR leaders adapt their strategies across a variety of mission-critical priorities to set up their organization for success.

Diagnostics and benchmarks

Guides and toolkits

Expert inquiry

Expert research

In-person events

Peer connections

Case studies and best practices

Live webinars and online learning events

Document reviews

Illustrative key initiative support you receive as a Gartner client:

Diagnose current state

Diagnose top talent risks facing your enterprise strategy using the Gartner Talent Risk Assessment Framework.

Leverage the Ignition Guide to Conduct Strategic Workforce Planning and speak with a Gartner expert to identify workforce needs.

Evaluate the effectiveness of your current leadership development investments using the seven Gartner hallmarks.

Develop your plan

Leverage the Gartner Talent Strategy Presentation Template to draft your strategy and work with a Gartner expert to fine tune it to gain stakeholder buy-in.

Follow Vizient's lead and create AI personas for your most critical segments to enable greater adoption and productivity.

Use Gartner data to develop a targeted strategy to support and develop leaders in their highest-risk, highest-stakes moments in 2025.

Execute and drive change

Follow Allstate's approach to develop the change influencers across your organization and ensure they have the right information relating to change.

Partner with Gartner for best practices to implement HR portfolio management to strategically align projects and optimize resources.

Partner with a Gartner expert to ensure timely and relevant talent strategy updates to the C-suite and board.

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