Introduction: The View From the C-Suite


Citing their research, The Conference Board shared CEOs’ top human capital challenges and beliefs about the future of work in 2025:

- CEOs’ top three human capital challenges are attraction and retention of top talent, the need to create new business models due to disruptive technologies, and developing next gen leaders.
- CEOs view the future organization as agile and flexible with greater collaboration across boundaries due to new technologies.
- Artificial intelligence will continue to emerge in different forms and will affect roles in various ways.
- Technology will continue to redefine human roles, and increasingly, job descriptions will be insufficient to define the work.
- CEOs believe their organizations must invest in future leaders in creative ways and future skill their workforce for roles that do not yet exist.

Breakout Discussions: The View from HR

After their presentation, The Conference Board invited the roughly 60 participants to discuss in breakout groups how human capital practitioners could respond to the challenges. Participants were senior HR practitioners from organizations such as American Express, Google, Sony Music, Cision, Wells Fargo, Payoneer, and Wildlife Conservation Society. The questions posed by The Conference Board were:

1. How can my organization prepare for the workforce and workplace of 2025?
2. How can my organization prepare leaders for 2025?
3. How do we foster an inclusive, ‘speak up’ culture?
4. How can my organization prepare for the impact of artificial intelligence?
5. What changes will our HR function need to make or who will we become?

Following are notes from the HR practitioners’ discussions.
1. How can my organization prepare for the workforce and workplace of 2025?
   - Invest in skill development, starting with HR, based on an assessment of the skill gaps
   - Develop leader behaviors for the future
   - Build inclusive teams for diversity of ideas and opinions
   - Think out of the box in rotating people – test their skills and develop additional skills
   - Identify future trends and support the development of new business models, reflecting disruptive technologies and customer centricity
   - Hire for skills and adaptability rather than titles and career experience
   - Encourage virtual workplaces
   - Encourage organizational agility, including within HR
   - Broaden leadership’s thinking about how the work gets done
   - Measure / reward output vs. process
   - Seek to understand the effect of churn, mobility, remote work, and contingent workforce on the workplace, including the stress on people

2. How can my organization prepare leaders for 2025?
   - Utilize data science to hire, inform decisions, do governance, and enable leaders
   - Do rotations to give future leaders broad exposure, identify and test for adaptability and potential, and be willing to experiment and fail
   - Set up mentoring (a blind spot for CEOs, based on TCB’s research), and mentor, coach, and train the mentors
   - Have both individual contributor and leadership career paths: reward experts effectively, and promote people into leadership roles who really want to lead people
   - Encourage sabbaticals for top performers to renew and refresh
   - Encourage continuous learning and development
   - Make a concerted effort to retain top talent
   - Make sure leaders are able to articulate a vision and bring people along
   - Supplement internal mentorship program with outside consultants to engage, reward, and develop future leaders
   - Training and development on an ongoing basis to ensure a high-potential remains a high-potential and leaders continue to grow and adapt for new challenges

3. How do we foster an inclusive, ‘speak up’ culture?
• Build psychological safety and trust
• Empower employees to speak up and take risks
• Ensure no retribution for speaking up
• Build teams with diversity of thought, and encourage them to innovate
• Reward people for experimenting and creating new ideas, even if they fail

4. How can my organization prepare for the impact of artificial intelligence?

• Balance high tech and high touch
• Recognize that we are human and have to be human. Start small with AI (crawl, walk, run)
• Focus on upskilling and reskilling
• Craft jobs in a way that emphasizes more generalists as opposed to specialists, and look to redefine roles to reflect that machines and people are interacting in new ways
• Recognize that work is becoming more complex because simple things are being automated
• Engage in a continual cycle of anticipating, planning, & readiness
• Go upstream to universities and high schools: they need to be part of the game because they develop the foundational skills in the future workforce
• Apply a change management approach to help the organization mentally prepare and become ready for the increasing role of AI in the workplace
• Cultivate learning agility, critical thinking, and growth mindset

6. What changes will our HR function need to make or who will we become?

• Let AI be AI, and let humans be more human
• Become more agile
• Become more tech savvy
• Have more data at your fingertips to share with clients via dashboards
• Be prepared for the unknown: no one can predict the future, and we’ll do the best we can
• Be willing to hire outside talent to supplement the HR department for specialty areas or specific oversight