



2026 CHRO Survey

Key Findings



Executive Summary

Business leaders in 2026 are navigating an environment defined by external uncertainty and rapid technological change. CHROs identify **geopolitical instability, inflation, and regulatory uncertainty** as the most significant external forces shaping company performance, reinforcing a focus on resilience and risk management.

While balancing those pressures, **AI and workplace digitization** have emerged as the dominant priorities on the CHRO agenda. Organizations are deploying AI in targeted areas such as talent acquisition, service delivery, and learning, while beginning to rethink the HR operating model and build new internal capabilities. However, scaling these efforts remains challenging, with organizational readiness—including **workforce concerns, governance risks, and investment constraints**—emerging as the primary barriers to adoption.

Beyond AI, CHROs continue to navigate **rising healthcare costs and evolving benefit strategies**, including increased focus on specialty pharmaceuticals and emerging treatments such as GLP-1 medications. Across these areas, leaders are balancing cost management with employee experience and long-term workforce outcomes.

Methodology

Our 2026 CHRO Survey is based on survey responses from an average of 150 CHROs at major corporations and was conducted in partnership with the University of South Carolina's Darla Moore School of Business. The findings presented here reflect a selection of questions from the full survey and are organized by topic. Open-ended responses were analyzed and grouped into key themes to identify common patterns and insights.



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Section 1

Business Environment

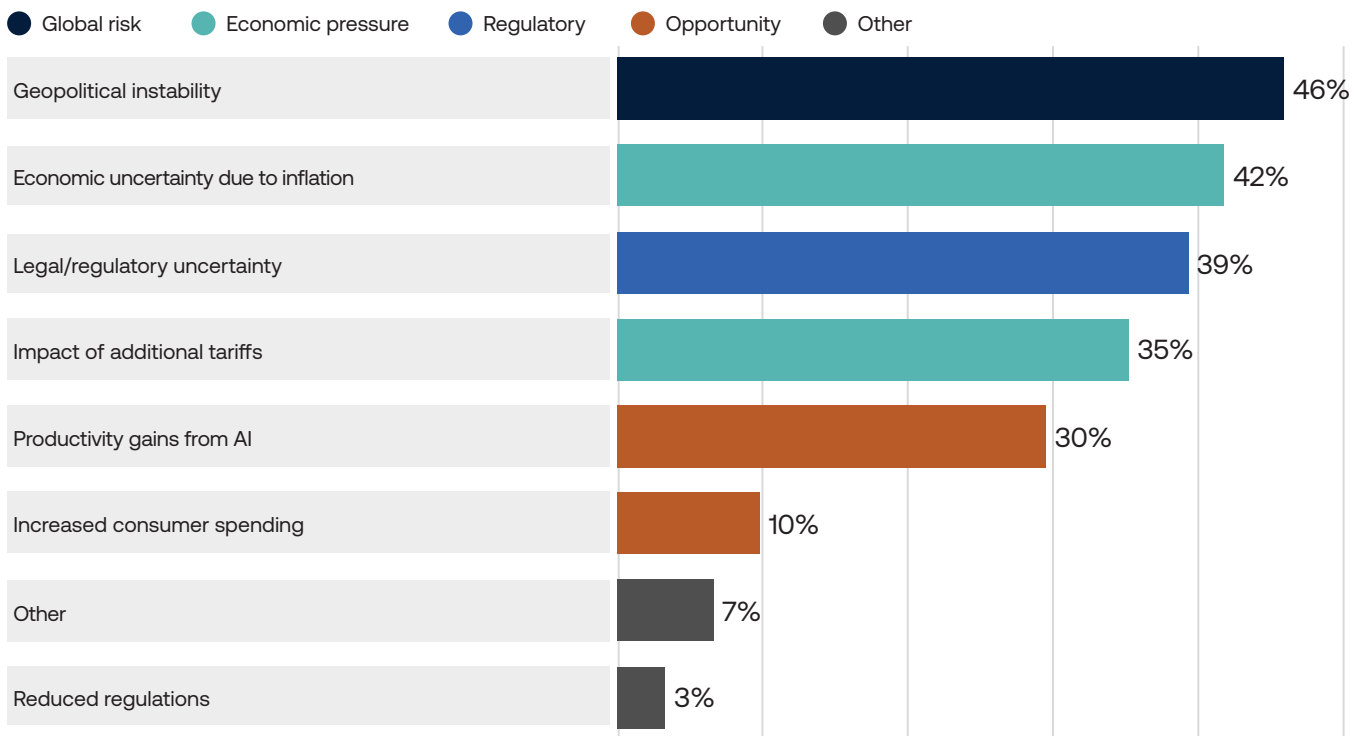
Q. Which external factors do you see as having the biggest impacts on your company's performance in 2026?*

Geopolitical and economic uncertainty are the external factors most likely to shape company performance in 2026.



46%
cite geopolitical
instability

Respondents most frequently cited geopolitical instability, inflation-driven economic uncertainty, and legal or regulatory changes as the external forces most likely to affect company performance in 2026. Trade policy—particularly the potential impact of additional tariffs—also ranks among the top concerns. While some leaders anticipate productivity gains from AI, most appear focused on navigating a volatile global environment rather than on potential economic tailwinds.



*Multiple responses permitted; percentages may exceed 100%.

Q. Select the five issues of most immediate concern to you as the lead human resources officer of a major corporation*

AI and digitization of the workplace dominate the CHRO agenda.

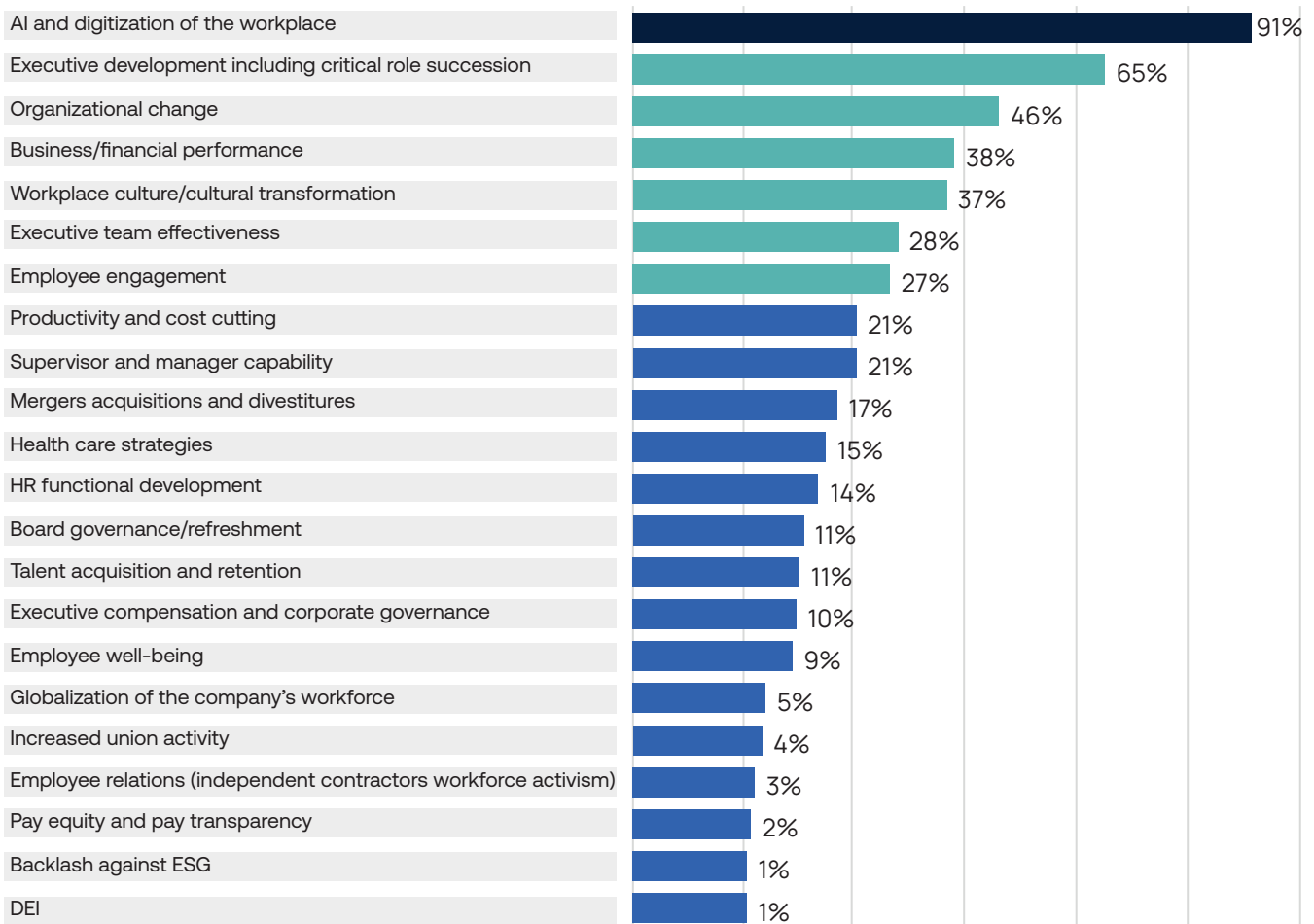


9 in 10 CHROs

selected AI as the top concern

When asked to identify their most immediate concerns, CHROs overwhelmingly pointed to AI and the digitization of the workplace, with more than nine in ten respondents selecting it as a top priority. The next tier of concerns centers on leadership and organizational transformation, including executive development, succession planning, and managing organizational change. Traditional HR priorities such as culture, engagement, and productivity remain important but rank behind the broader challenge of helping organizations navigate technological and business transformation.

● AI disruption ● Leadership & transformation ● Operational HR



*Multiple responses permitted; percentages may exceed 100%.

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Section 2

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

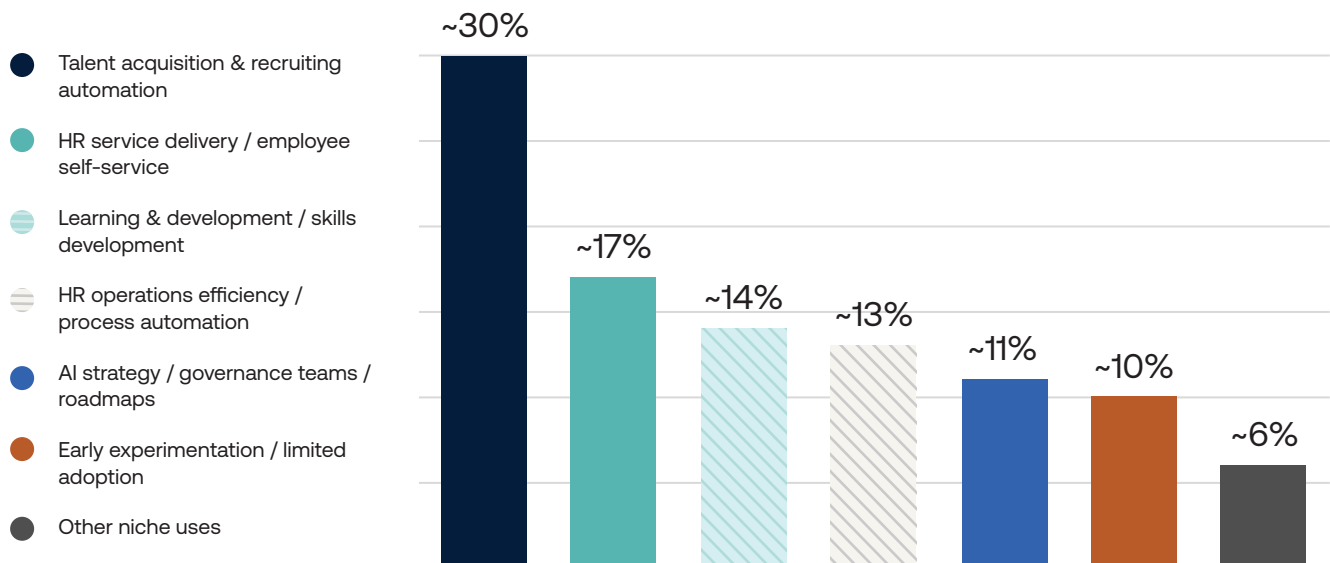
Q. What have been some successes in implementing AI in your HR function?

AI adoption in HR is concentrated in talent acquisition, service delivery, and learning.



30%
focus on talent acquisition

While many organizations are exploring AI across the enterprise, HR adoption remains concentrated in a few high-impact areas. CHROs report that early deployments are focused on recruiting, employee service delivery, and learning—functions where automation and digital tools can quickly improve efficiency and the employee experience.



“Digital platforms will increasingly become the front door for all HR transactions, fundamentally changing how employees interact with the HR function.”

— CHRO, Global Medical Technology Company

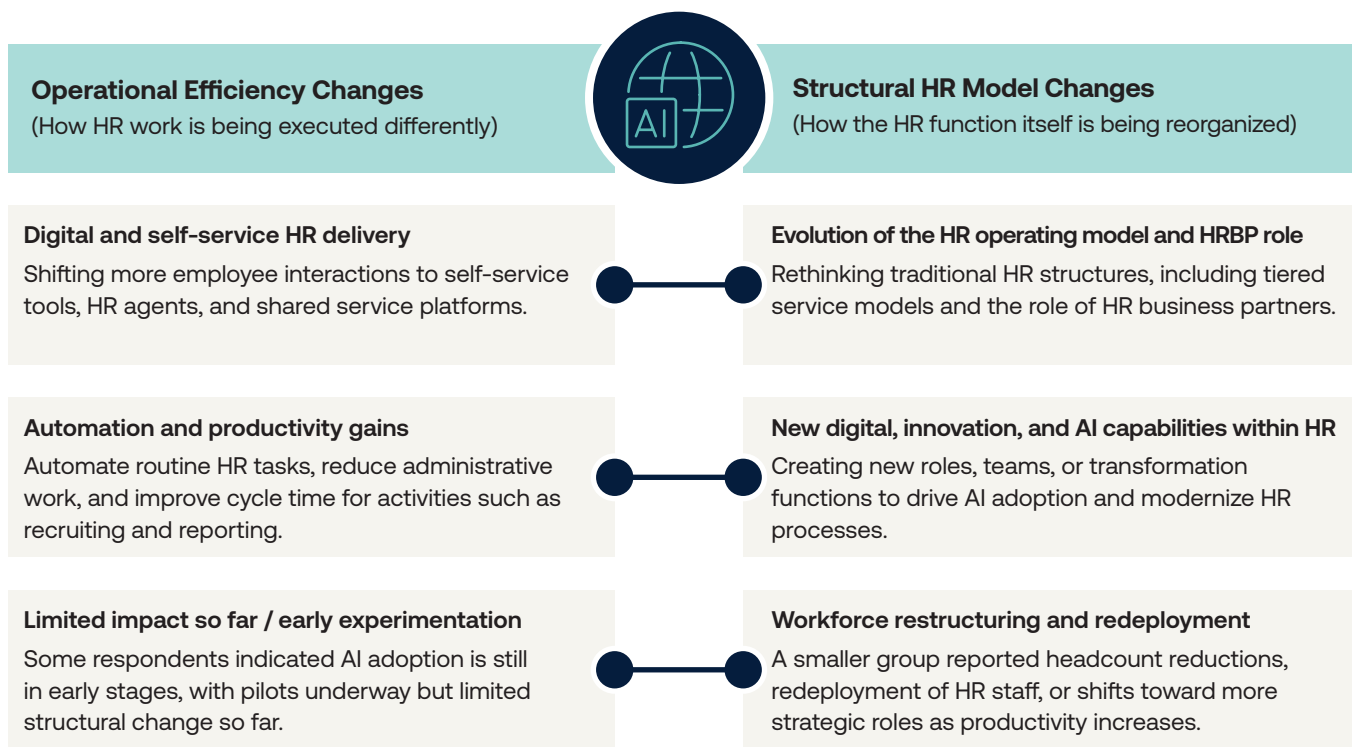
AI is prompting CHROs to rethink the HR operating model.

Beyond improving efficiency, AI is beginning to reshape how HR work is structured and delivered across the organization.

Respondents describe early shifts toward digital service models, evolving HR business partner roles, and the creation of new capabilities to support AI adoption within the function.

“ AI is becoming the impetus to rethink the traditional three-tier HR model. ”

— CHRO, Global Financial Services Company



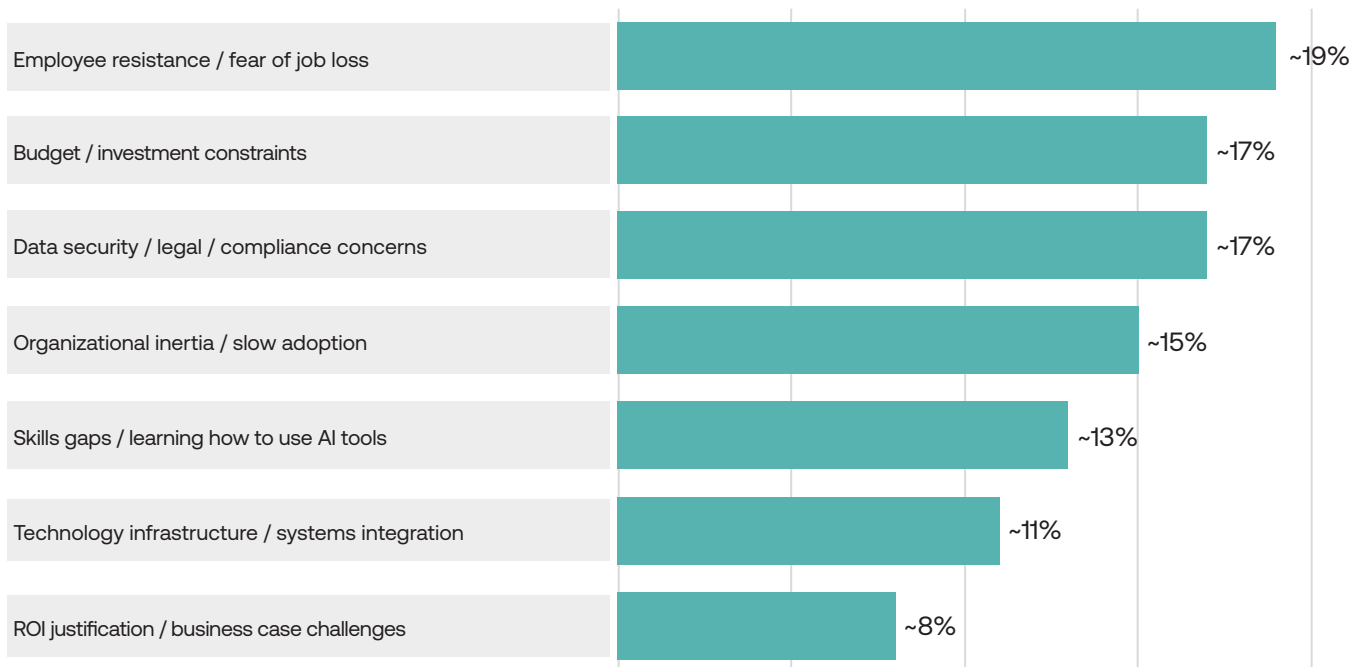
Q. What are the challenges in implementing AI in your HR function?

The biggest barriers to AI adoption in HR are organizational, not technological.

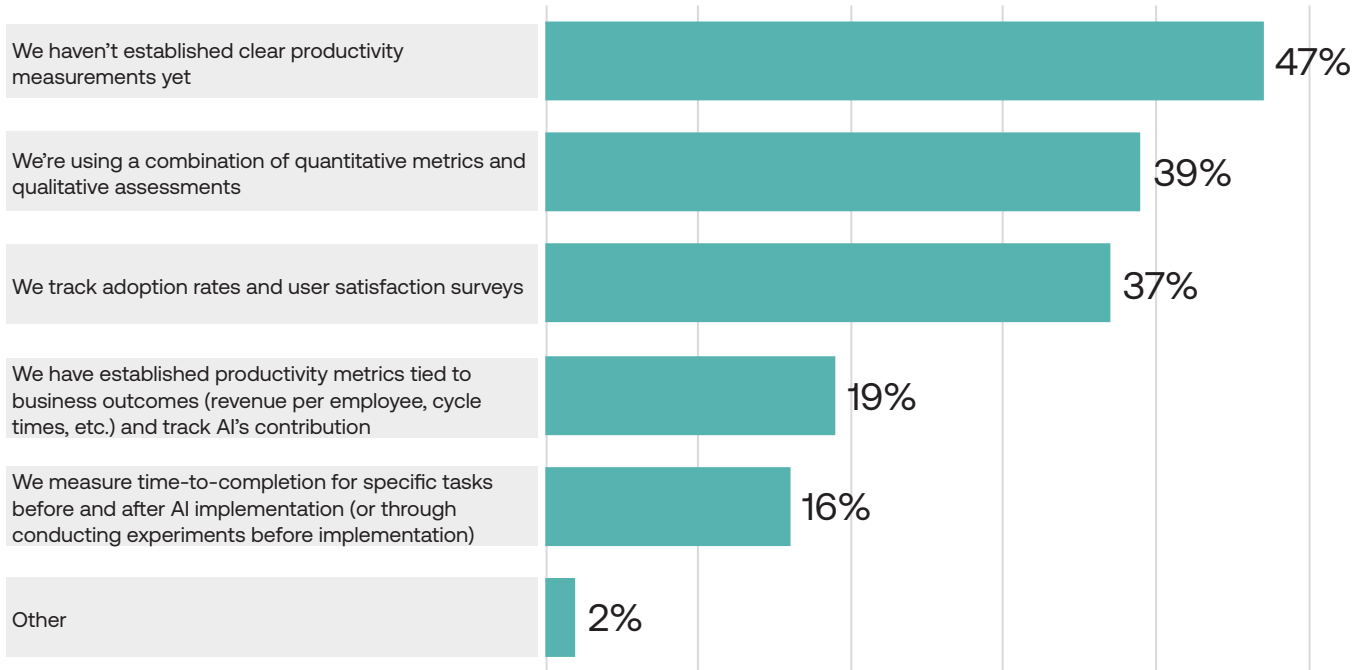
While many organizations are experimenting with AI across HR functions, scaling these efforts remains challenging. CHROs report that the biggest obstacles are not the technology itself, but organizational readiness—including employee concerns about job displacement, governance and compliance risks, and the challenge of securing investment.

“One of the biggest challenges is the fear of job loss among employees whose roles may be affected by AI.”

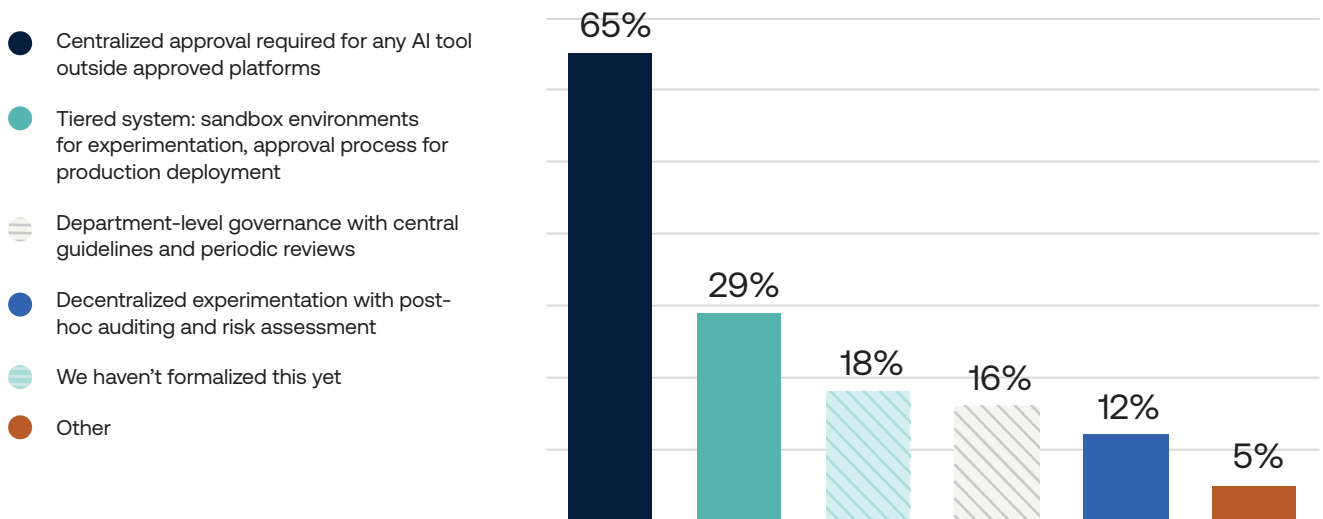
— CHRO, Fortune 100 Healthcare Company



Q. How are you measuring productivity gains from AI?*

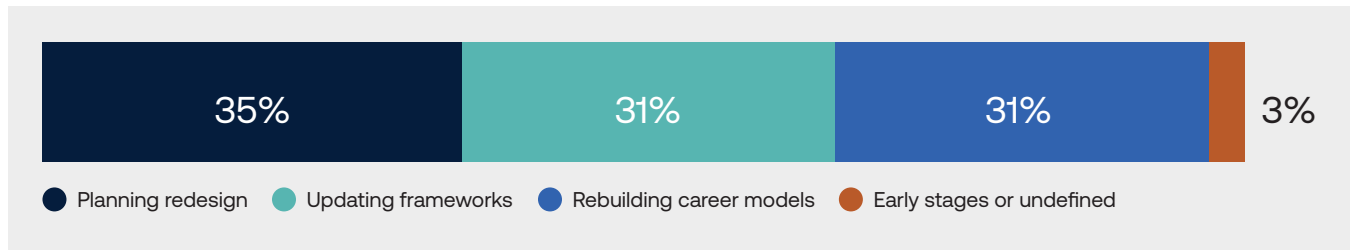
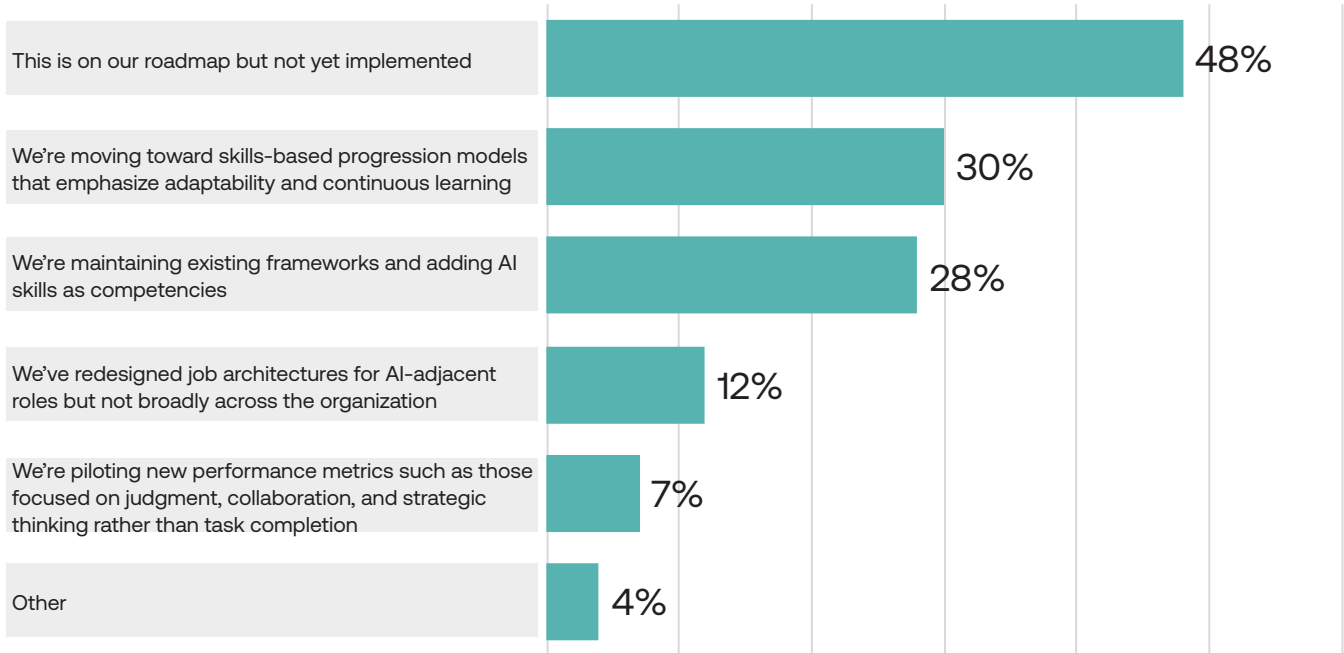


Q. What governance model have you established for employees creating custom AI agents?*



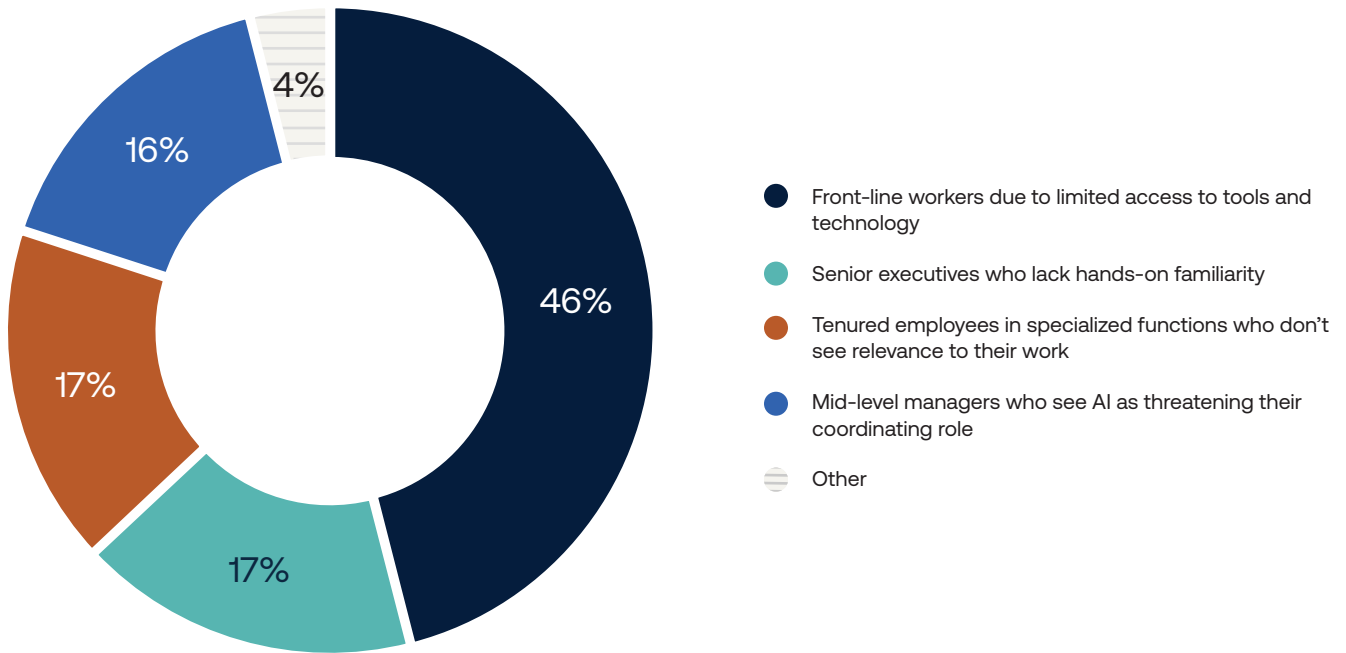
*Multiple responses permitted; percentages may exceed 100%.

Q. How are you redesigning performance management and career progression in response to AI?*

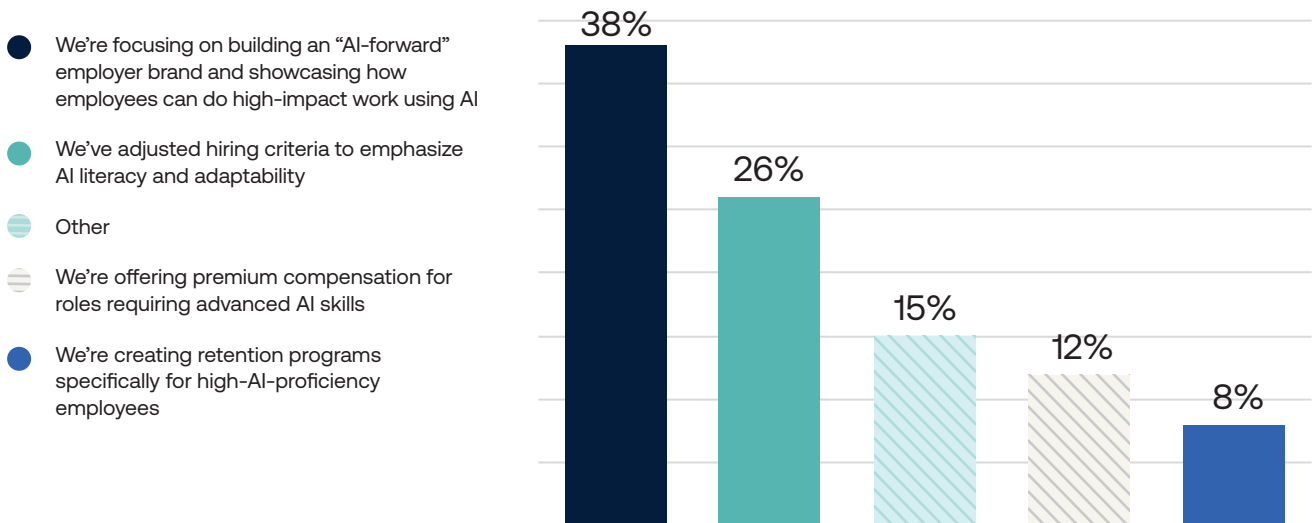


*Multiple responses permitted; percentages may exceed 100%.

Q. What employee segments are showing the widest gap in AI readiness or adoption?

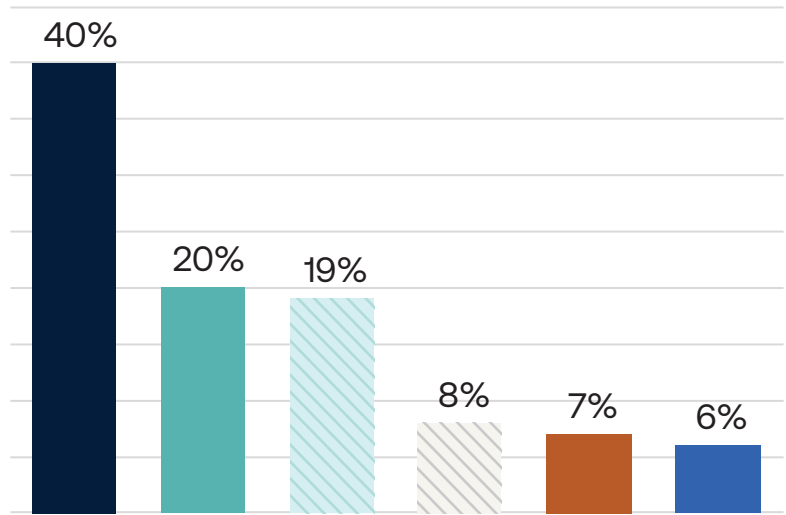


Q. How are you preparing for the talent market impact of AI?



Q. What approach are you taking to reskill employees affected by AI?

- We're taking a gradual transition approach — redeploying affected employees to higher-value tasks while their routine work shifts to AI
- We're offering voluntary reskilling programs
- We're primarily managing this through attrition and selective hiring freezes rather than proactive reskilling
- Other
- We're being transparent about at-risk roles and offering comprehensive reskilling with guaranteed placement in new positions for successful participants
- We've conducted a skills gap analysis and are providing targeted training pathways to adjacent roles within the company



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Section 3 Healthcare

Q. Which strategies is your organization using to manage rising healthcare costs, particularly related to specialty pharmaceuticals?*

Employers are relying primarily on plan design and pharmacy management to control rising specialty drug costs.



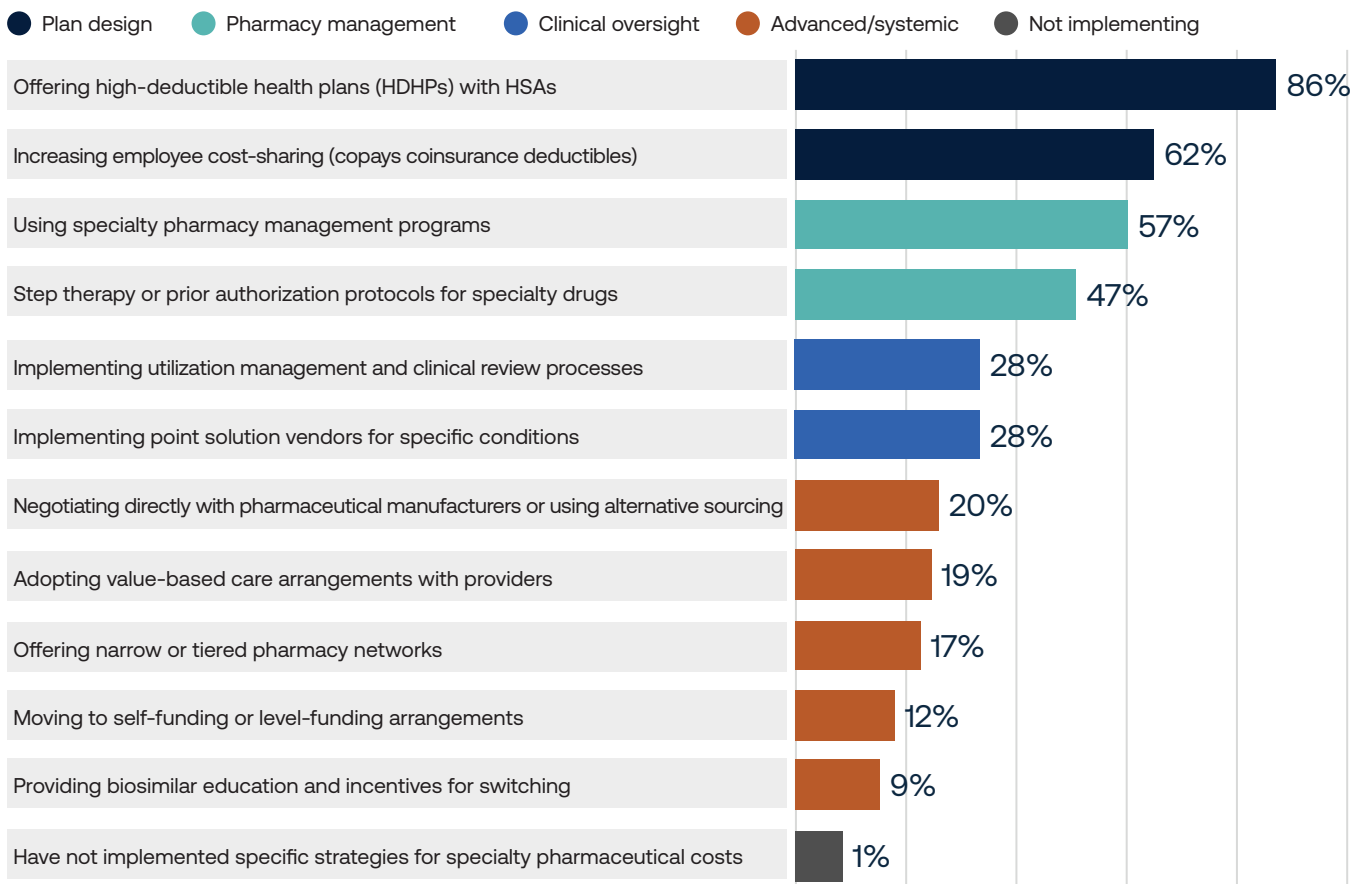
86%

of employers use HDHPs with HSAs

19%

of employers adopted value-based care

As healthcare costs continue to rise—particularly those associated with specialty pharmaceuticals—employers are relying heavily on plan design changes and cost-sharing mechanisms to manage spending. The most widely used strategies include offering high-deductible health plans with health savings accounts and increasing employee cost-sharing. Many organizations are also implementing pharmacy management tools, such as specialty pharmacy programs and prior authorization protocols, while more advanced approaches like value-based care arrangements and direct manufacturer negotiations remain less common.



*Multiple responses permitted; percentages may exceed 100%.

Q. Does your organization's health plan currently cover GLP-1 medications (such as Wegovy, Zepbound, Saxenda) for weight loss/obesity management (not diabetes treatment)?

Employers are cautiously expanding coverage of GLP-1 medications for weight loss.



59%

Cover GLP-1 for weight loss

GLP-1 medications such as Wegovy, Zepbound, and Saxenda have quickly emerged as a major issue for employer-sponsored health plans. Nearly half of organizations report covering these medications for weight loss or obesity management, though most do so with specific eligibility criteria designed to control utilization and cost. At the same time, a significant share of employers continue to limit coverage to diabetes treatment, reflecting ongoing uncertainty about the long-term financial and clinical implications of widespread GLP-1 use.

