

AI at Work: reshaping culture, employee experience & future readiness

The future isn't about choosing between humans and AI. It is about bringing the strengths of both together, across five conversations built around one boardroom question: how do we prepare our people and our business for what comes next.

01

Talent Strategy

02

Future Readiness

03

Culture

04

Employee
Experience

05

Leadership

Shared Future
Roundtable Report

Why we gathered the room

Every function in the enterprise is being asked the same question this year: what does AI actually change for us? HR was asked to answer it twice: once for the business it serves, and once for itself.

The Shared Future HR Roundtable brought together senior HR and business leaders (CHROs, Heads of HR, talent leaders, and functional heads from across industries) for a closed-door session in Pune. The brief was simple to state and hard to answer: not "what is AI," but what AI-enabled work actually demands of anyone responsible for people, starting now.

Instead of one big panel, the group broke into five smaller conversations, each taking on a different edge of the same problem: hiring, capability, culture, experience, and leadership. People moved between a few structured prompts and a lot of open debate, and each group was asked to walk away with one takeaway worth carrying back to their own leadership table.

What follows isn't a transcript. It's a synthesis, put together the way a busy HR or business leader would actually use it: the tension each group wrestled with, where they landed, and what it means for the next twelve months of people strategy.

05

PARALLEL DISCUSSION ROOMS, ONE SHARED BRIEF

01

QUESTION UNDERNEATH ALL FIVE: HOW DO WE STAY
HUMAN AT SCALE

2026

THE YEAR AI ADOPTION MOVED FROM PILOT TO
POLICY

This document is intended for HR leaders and business leaders, including CHROs, Heads of HR, and cross-functional leadership teams, shaping their AI-and-workforce agenda for the year ahead.

The brief, in five moves

Strip away the discussion and one argument holds it all together: AI isn't a talent-function project. It's a leadership decision, and HR is best placed to own the human side of it.

01 **Hiring gets faster. Judgement doesn't get automated.**

AI can compress screening and scheduling, but intent, culture fit, and the final call still belong to a person. Speed without judgement just moves bad decisions faster.

02 **Skills expire faster than the training calendar updates.**

The half-life of a technical skill keeps shrinking, and most L&D calendars can't keep pace. Reskilling has to become something people do as part of the job, not a course they get sent to once a year.

03 **AI adoption is really a culture question.**

Whether a rollout works or stalls usually comes down to trust, permission to experiment, and whether anyone bothers to measure the outcome, not how advanced the model is.

04 **Efficiency shows up on a P&L. Empathy shows up in retention.**

People will put up with a slower process before they'll put up with a hollow one. Automate the transaction and forget the relationship, and you lose the engagement AI was supposed to create.

05 **Leadership is the real constraint, not the technology.**

Every group arrived at some version of the same point: how far AI takes a business depends on how well its leaders bring curiosity, judgement, and steady hands to the change, not on what the model can do.

Who Hired the AI?

On what AI should, and shouldn't, decide in the talent pipeline

THE TENSION

Every recruiter in the room had already automated something, whether that was screening resumes, scheduling interviews, or sending the first outreach message. None of them had automated the moment that actually decides who gets hired. The real question wasn't whether to use AI in hiring. It was where the handoff back to a person needs to happen, and how to keep that line from creeping.

WHERE THE DEBATE ACTUALLY LANDED

Volume versus judgement. AI is genuinely good at the high-volume, low-ambiguity parts of hiring: parsing applications, matching keywords, finding a slot on the calendar. It's far less reliable on the low-volume, high-ambiguity parts: reading motivation, weighing an unusual career path, sensing whether someone will actually fit how a specific team works.

Bias doesn't go away. It just changes shape. A few leaders pointed out that AI screening can re-learn the biases baked into past "successful hire" data, unless someone is actively checking what the model has learned to reward. Where the group landed: AI can build the shortlist, but a person still has to answer for what's on it.

Candidates notice. One observation kept coming up, a little uncomfortably: candidates can tell when a process feels automated end to end, and it changes how they behave, including whether they take the offer. Faster hiring only pays off if it still feels like the company noticed you.

GROUP AGENDA

Name explicitly, in your hiring policy, which decisions AI is permitted to make outright, which it may only recommend, and which stay fully human. Audit that boundary quarterly, not just at rollout.

KEY TAKEAWAY

**AI can make hiring faster.
Human judgement makes it meaningful.**



GROUP 01 IN DISCUSSION

Oops, My Skills Expired

On building a workforce that reskills by default, not by programme

THE TENSION

Nearly everyone in the room runs some kind of learning function already. Almost nobody thinks it moves fast enough anymore. The problem isn't budget, and it isn't content. It's timing. A skill that was current eighteen months ago can be out of date before the annual training calendar even cycles back around to it.

POINTS THAT STUCK

A programme has a ceiling. Nominate, enrol, complete, certify: that loop assumes skills change slower than the business does, and for anything AI-related, it doesn't anymore. The group's take: continuous learning needs to be part of how work happens day to day, not an event people get scheduled into.

Managers are the real infrastructure. People don't experience "a learning culture" through a platform. They experience it through whether their manager gives them time to get comfortable with a new tool, or makes room for the clumsy early stage of learning it. More than one leader said their biggest blocker was manager confidence, not employee willingness.

Not every gap is technical. As AI takes over more routine work, the group flagged something else: judgement, prompting, knowing when to trust or question an AI's output, and working across functions, are all becoming the scarce skills, and none of them are taught the way a certification is.

GROUP AGENDA

Shift one core metric: stop measuring learning by completions, and start measuring it by how quickly a team can apply a new capability inside live work.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Upskilling needs to move from a programme to a culture.



GROUP 02 IN DISCUSSION

AI at Work: My Culture

On why AI rollouts are culture projects that happen to involve software

THE TENSION

Two companies in the room had rolled out very similar AI tools with very different results. The tools weren't the difference; both used comparable platforms. What differed was whether people trusted that trying the tool was safe, and whether they believed they'd be judged on the outcome rather than on how visibly "AI-first" they looked.

WHAT KEPT COMING UP

Trust is the actual adoption metric. Where people believed a failed experiment wouldn't be held against them, usage climbed and stayed up. Where AI use started to feel like a surveillance question, a way of checking who's actually logging in, adoption turned shallow and performative fast.

Permission to experiment has to be built, not assumed. Several leaders described deliberately setting up small, low-stakes spaces to try AI: a real team, explicit permission, and no penalty if it didn't work. More than one called it the single most effective culture move they'd made, more effective than any mandate from the top.

Outcomes, not activity. The group was blunt about a common failure mode: leadership teams celebrating rollout numbers, seats licensed, logins tracked, instead of the actual business outcome the tool was meant to produce. That's usually where AI initiatives quietly stall.

GROUP AGENDA

Before the next AI rollout, ask what happens to an employee whose AI experiment fails publicly. If the honest answer is "nothing good," culture, not capability, is the blocker.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Organisations that win with AI will redesign how people and technology work together.



GROUP 03 IN DISCUSSION

Dear AI, I Have Feelings

On what gets lost when the employee journey gets automated end to end

THE TENSION

Chatbots already handle a growing share of the employee lifecycle: onboarding questions, policy lookups, first-line HR queries. The efficiency case is easy to make. The harder question the group sat with: what happens to the moments that were never really about information: a manager noticing someone's burned out, a hard conversation about a missed promotion, or the nerves on someone's first day that a scripted welcome message was never going to fix.

THE UNCOMFORTABLE PARTS

Automate the transaction, not the relationship. The clearest line the group drew: let AI take the repetitive, low-stakes parts of the employee journey so people have more time, not less, for the moments that actually need empathy. Get that backwards and you hollow out exactly the moments people remember.

"Handled" isn't the same as "heard." A good AI assistant can close a query faster than a person can. It can't yet make someone feel like the company actually noticed them. The group expects that distinction to matter more and more for engagement scores as these tools scale.

Emotional intelligence is now a leadership skill, not just an HR one. As AI picks up more administrative HR work, managers, not the HR function, become the main carriers of what's still human about the employee experience. Most of them aren't equipped for that yet.

GROUP AGENDA

Map your employee journey and mark every moment that is actually emotional, not just informational. Protect those explicitly from automation, and resource managers to own them well.

KEY TAKEAWAY

**AI understands patterns.
Humans understand
people.**



GROUP 04 IN DISCUSSION

Boss Mode: Updating...

On what actually differentiates a leader once AI is table stakes

THE TENSION

Once every leader in a business has roughly the same AI tools, the tools stop being what sets anyone apart. What's left is judgement the tool doesn't have, and the ability to bring a team through change the tool can't explain. Nobody in the room disagreed that leadership needs to evolve. The real debate was whether most leadership pipelines are actually built for it.

WHERE THE ROOM AGREED

Curiosity is now a real leadership skill. Leaders who stayed personally hands-on with new tools, instead of pushing "the AI thing" down to someone else, were consistently the ones whose teams adopted AI well. Distance from the tool sent a signal, whether the leader meant it to or not.

Judgement is the premium, precisely because it can't be automated. As AI generates more of the options, analysis, and first drafts, a leader's job shifts further toward deciding what's actually right for this business, this team, this moment. That's not a call you can hand to a model.

Guide the change. Don't just announce it. The leaders who handled AI adoption best weren't the ones with the most confident rollout memo. They were the ones who stayed visible through the messy middle, and kept answering the "does this affect my job" question honestly, more than once.

GROUP AGENDA

Build AI fluency and change-leadership into the next leadership assessment cycle, not as a separate digital-skills add-on, but as core criteria for who gets promoted into people leadership.

KEY TAKEAWAY

AI changes the tools of leadership, not the need for human leadership.



GROUP 05 IN DISCUSSION

Five groups, one signal

Read on their own, these are five separate concerns. Read together, they point to one thing: the discipline to keep decisions human where it matters, and let AI carry the load everywhere else.

01

Human judgement still matters most

AI can process information at scale, but context, empathy, and owning the final call still sit with people. Nobody in the room treated that as a temporary gap waiting to be engineered away.

02

AI should add to the work, not just remove it

The deployments that actually paid off freed people up to do more of the work only they can do, not just the same work, faster, with fewer people involved in what happens next.

03

Learning has to keep up in real time

Adaptability, more than any single technical skill, is what will separate the organisations that stay ahead from the ones still catching up to their own tools.

04

Measure what changed, not how busy the tool looks

Licences issued and logins logged don't mean much on their own. The standard the group kept coming back to: did this actually move a number leadership cares about.

05

Human skills just got more valuable, not less

As AI takes on more routine and technical work, empathy, creativity, critical thinking, and judgement stop being the "nice to have" skills around the edge of a job. They become the actual differentiator, and increasingly, the real basis for who gets hired, developed, and promoted.

Taking this back to the leadership table

A roundtable is only as useful as what it changes afterward. Here's what each conversation actually covered, and where it landed.

GROUP 01 Who Hired the AI?

Every recruiter at the table had already automated something, resume screening, interview scheduling, that first outreach message. But nobody had handed over the moment that actually decides who gets hired, and that turned out to be the real conversation: not whether to use AI, but where the handoff back to a person has to happen. AI is genuinely strong at the high-volume, low-ambiguity work. It's much shakier reading motivation or sensing whether someone fits how a specific team works, and there's a sharper problem underneath that: AI screening can re-learn the biases baked into old "successful hire" data unless someone is actively checking what it's learned to reward. So the shortlist can be AI's. What's on it still has to be someone's responsibility, in writing, and every hiring manager needs to hear that directly.

GROUP 02 Oops, My Skills Expired

Nearly everyone in the room already runs a learning function. Almost nobody thinks it moves fast enough. It's not a budget problem or a content problem, it's a timing one, a skill that was current eighteen months ago can be dead before the training calendar even cycles back to it. What was more interesting than the diagnosis was where the group placed the blame: not on employees dragging their feet, but on managers who don't yet have the confidence to give people room to be clumsy with something new. People don't feel a "learning culture" through a platform. They feel it through their manager. So the fix isn't a bigger programme, it's a different question entirely: instead of counting who finished a course, start tracking how fast a team can actually put a new capability to work.

GROUP 03 AI at Work: My Culture

Two companies in the room had rolled out nearly identical AI tools and gotten opposite results, and it had nothing to do with the technology. It came down to trust. Where people believed a failed experiment wouldn't come back to bite them, usage kept climbing. Where it started to feel like a way of checking who's logging in, adoption went shallow fast. More than one leader said the single most effective thing they'd done wasn't a mandate from the top, it was carving out a small, low-stakes space where a team could try AI with explicit permission to fail. And there was a warning in there too: initiatives quietly die when leadership starts celebrating licences and logins instead of asking what actually changed. Give people somewhere safe to fail, and judge what happened, not how busy it looked.

Continued: where the last two conversations landed

GROUP 04 Dear AI, I Have Feelings

Chatbots are already handling a growing share of the employee lifecycle, onboarding questions, policy lookups, the first line of HR support. Nobody in the room doubted that was useful. What worried them was everything a chatbot was never built for: a manager noticing someone's burned out, a hard conversation about a promotion that didn't happen, the nerves of someone's first day. The distinction that stuck was between being handled and being heard, an AI assistant can close a ticket faster than a person ever could, but it can't make someone feel like the company actually noticed them. And there's a shift coming that most managers aren't ready for: as AI absorbs the admin work, they become the main carriers of whatever's still human about the employee experience. Automate the transaction. Leave the relationship alone. Then go find the emotional moments in your own employee journey and protect them on purpose.

GROUP 05 Boss Mode: Updating...

Once every leader has roughly the same AI tools sitting in front of them, the tools stop being what sets anyone apart. What's left is judgement the tool doesn't have, and the nerve to walk a team through change it can't explain. The room noticed something telling: leaders who stayed personally hands-on with new tools, instead of pushing "the AI thing" onto someone else, were consistently the ones whose teams actually adopted it well. Distance sent a signal, whether the leader meant it to or not. And the leaders who handled the transition best weren't the ones who sent the most confident memo. They were the ones still around for the messy middle, answering "does this affect my job" honestly, more than once. That's not a skill you can bolt on later. It belongs in how you decide who gets promoted into leadership in the first place.



THE FULL ROOM — SHARED FUTURE HR ROUNDTABLE, PUNE 2026

SHARED FUTURE

• R O U N D T A B L E •

CLOSING THOUGHT

The future of work isn't Human
vs. AI.
It's Human **×** AI.

Successful AI transformation was never really about the technology.
What the room agreed on, in the end, was simpler to say and harder
to do: build an organisation where technology lets people do more,
and the work itself still feels unmistakably human.

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