



ManpowerGroup®



# The Human Edge

## Global Future of Work Trends



# The Driving Forces Shaping the Workforce

For more than 10 years, we have partnered with our clients to explore four underlying forces shaping the future of work. This year's research includes insights from surveys of more than 12,000 workers and 40,000 employers across 41 countries. As the pace of change accelerates, these forces are evolving more rapidly than ever before.



# The Human Edge: Future of Work Trends

## Hybrid Super Teams

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# Hybrid Super Teams

Rather than existing in a traditional, hierarchical structure future teams will include a mix of human, machine, and freelance talent and jobs will be flexibly reconfigured with the unique strengths of people and AI in mind.



## Trend 1: Role Redesign

Although some jobs may be rendered obsolete by emerging technologies, many more will be reconfigured to incorporate the unique strengths of human workers and AI-based components. We will see many organizations move from informal use of AI in existing jobs to targeted, workflow-specific use in redesigned human roles.



One third of employers worldwide say ethical judgment, customer service and team management skills are the most difficult to automate.<sup>2</sup>



### Workforce Implications

With a mandate from the top, job redesign must take place at the department level. It's a thoughtful, objectives-driven process with collaboration between leaders and the individual employees doing the work. Workforce planning now includes breaking down traditional jobs into value-added parts, assigning those parts to human and AI partners, and creating aligned job categories and roles.



### Looking Ahead

The corporate organizational chart has not changed in many decades, but job redesign will require us to rethink the size of our companies and how much hierarchy is needed and feasible.



### » Today's Action

*Have you documented the critical tasks associated with each job and noted areas where technology could be efficiently integrated?*



**39%** of the core skills workers need will change by 2030.<sup>1</sup>

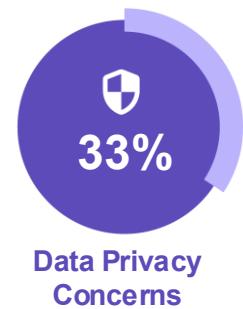


## Trend 2: AI Augmentation



Organizations will develop and replicate use cases that move beyond using basic industrial and software automation for administrative tasks and generative AI for research and meeting summaries. Rather than serving as limited add-ons, intelligent AI agents will fully participate in every workflow, working in concert with humans and with each other.

As AI adoption continues to scale, business leaders say their greatest challenges are:<sup>1</sup>



### » Today's Action

*When you integrate an AI-based component into a traditionally human-driven process, are you engaging in change management practices to ensure proper rollout and adoption?*



### Workforce Implications

As AI agents take over more traditionally human-driven workflows, knowledgeable humans must remain in the loop to prevent unexpected AI bottlenecks and mistakes, as well as diluted expertise. We will redefine what it means to be a manager skilled in optimizing the strengths of humans and technology.



### Looking Ahead

Although humans will work with many types of AI agents, one “ride or die” assistant-type may emerge by the early 2030s. The bond between human and AI partners may constitute a third relationship that involves personal rapport and blurs the lines between simulated and real emotion.



## Trend 3: Blunt Force Automation

Many leaders are considering what processes could be automated versus what would be most beneficial to automate, often highlighting efforts to streamline operations in shareholder communications. While workforce reductions have become more common, some leaders are beginning to rehire employees after realizing that current automation solutions may not be fully capable of operating independently.

### Workforce Implications

Blunt force automation reflects short-term thinking and a misplaced belief that automation and AI-based technologies can categorically replace human workers. Without effective job redesign and human oversight, businesses run mostly by smart machine labor will quickly falter.

### Looking Ahead

Five years from now, it will be typical to enter retail and other business locations and see few to no people in the space. Today, we must think through the human experience of this development – what happens to customers and other stakeholders who need something complex and can't find anyone to talk to?



Employers believe the job functions that will change the most due to automation in the next five years:<sup>2</sup>



### Today's Action

*Have you discussed how workers might be upskilled and redeployed before deciding on a layoff?*



## Trend 4: Gig Goes Big

The global workforce is moving quickly toward the trend of rapid talent assembly, or constructing short-term teams comprised of different employment resources (e.g., employees, contractors, freelancers, AI agents) for the purpose of solving a specific business problem. Recognizing that fewer full-time employees means fewer overhead expenses and an increased need for agility, these roles will decline in prevalence.

**By 2027, up to half the workforce in the developed world could participate in the gig economy.<sup>1</sup>**



### Workforce Implications

Although gig and temporary careers make sense, rewarding most workers this way requires a societal shift. Most workers are not trained in how to set up and run a contract career, don't have the inclination or mindset for it, and rely heavily on full-time employers for holistic care such as medical and lifestyle benefits.



### Today's Action

*Have you considered how the employment structure of each team might vary based on the business problem that needs to be solved?*



### Looking Ahead

The decline of the full-time role will result in many human workers falling through the cracks, unable to earn a family-sustaining wage or progress in their skills. This may prompt renewed calls for universal basic income or another type of safety net to take the place of the full-time employer.

**27% of Gen Z workers currently supplement their primary income with part-time or gig work.<sup>2</sup>**





# Rapid Relearning

*The future of work will be won by those who truly qualify as fast learners. Workers will continually be called upon to develop new skills in keeping with ongoing AI integration, and their job effectiveness and productivity will be scrutinized like never before.*



## Trend 5: AI Literacy



When mentioned in job descriptions today, AI literacy is an amorphous concept. We will see specific competencies associated with AI literacy or fluency emerge, including prompt engineering for existing systems, critical analysis of AI input, and ethical deployment of new AI-based workflows. Far from a panacea for lazy humans, true AI literacy will involve thinking more, not less.



### Workforce Implications

The AI literacy skill will be a great democratizer, because learning it doesn't require an advanced degree, and everyone has access to free online training. The challenge lies in ensuring AI workforce best practices are standardized across countries, regions and even individual organizations.



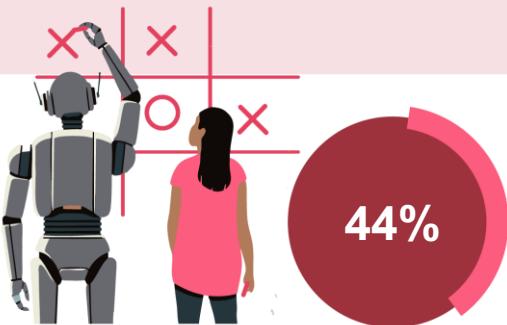
### Looking Ahead

As we crystallize what we mean by AI literacy, we risk increasing the skills gap between those who have it and those who don't. In previous digital transformations, women and underserved communities were often left behind. Business leaders must ensure these communities can fully participate in the workplace of the future as AI innovation accelerates.



### >> Today's Action

*How are you training employees with limited exposure to and enthusiasm for AI-based technologies?*

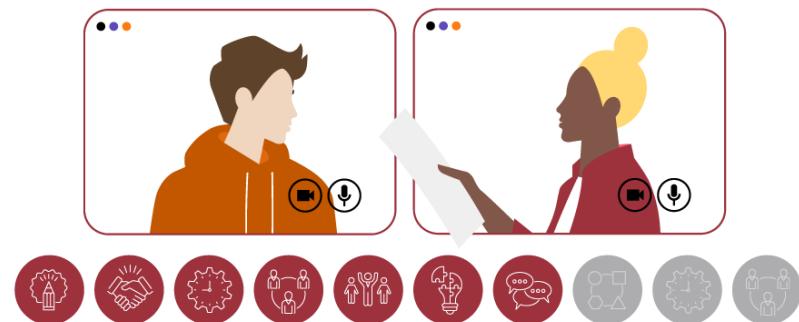


**Less than half of global workers received skills training in the past six months.<sup>1</sup>**



## Trend 6: Pre-Industrial Skills

Pre-industrial skills included competencies such as agriculture, survival, manual work and precision craftsmanship. They also include soft skills such as problem-solving, cognitive flexibility, self-reflection, creativity, empathy, intuition, and interpersonal communication. Human workers will need these skills to differentiate themselves from their AI teammates and to keep pace with the demands of the modern world.



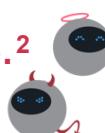
Seven of the top ten fastest-growing skills workers will need in 2030 are soft skills.<sup>1</sup>



### Workforce Implications

Today's workforce training tends to overemphasize hard skills that are job-specific and have a short half-life. And combined with an education system set up so learning may be obsolete by the time a student graduates, we will continue to experience skills gaps until we teach human workers skills that will help them succeed in *any* job.

**Employers worldwide say ethical judgment is the most difficult skill to automate.<sup>2</sup>**



### Today's Action

*How are you capturing and tracking pre-industrial skills in your skills taxonomies?*



### Looking Ahead

As we rely more and more on technology for basic organizational functioning, we increase the probability that when something goes wrong, human workers won't have the core skills or wherewithal to fix it. By teaching our children pre-industrial skills in school, we can protect ourselves against a lack of disaster preparedness.



## Trend 7: Productivity Push

The definition of what it takes to be considered competent at a job is shifting in real-time and is complicated by the fact that many leaders think AI implementation will result in immediate productivity gains. As employee surveillance grows more sophisticated, performance metrics are becoming more objective but also narrower in scope.

**The global productivity impact of low employee engagement is \$438 billion.<sup>1</sup>**

### **Workforce Implications**

Human workers are collapsing under the weight of leaders' unrealistic expectations about AI's impact on productivity. Today, it's more typical for productivity to decrease as employees struggle to retrofit new systems into established processes, performance using these tools is subjective, and many workers yearn for AI managers so they can be evaluated impartially.

### **Looking Ahead**

We now have an opportunity to redesign performance and rewards systems to measure concrete contributions to and lasting impact on the organization. Hopefully, by the early 2030s, we will see recognition and incentives offered in real time for the specific work that matters, and an increase in impact productivity.



### **Today's Action**

*Do your current performance evaluation and compensation structures account for evolving job responsibilities?*



**63%**

**Six in ten workers worldwide say they are burned out.<sup>2</sup>**



## Trend 8: Upskilling Renaissance

Upskilling, or teaching employees new skills relevant to their existing jobs, has become mandatory for all frontline and office workers who interface with digital and AI-based systems. Organizations have outgrown the traditional onsite Learning & Development (L&D) model, with a variety of internal and external options from work-based learning via apprenticeships to tuition reimbursement for certifications and degrees at partner schools.

### Workforce Implications

Workers with the benefit of full-time employment have the advantage of intelligent learning management systems to advise on and provide access to upskilling activities. However, government support is needed to bridge the upskilling opportunity gap for part-time, freelance, and unemployed individuals.

### Looking Ahead

In the 2030s, many human workers will be broadly upskilled, capable of managing a variety of roles within an organization. As learning agility moves into first place as the most valuable human attribute, people at all life stages will seek innovative and immersive solutions for quick but comprehensive skill mastery, which are likely to include metaverse training environments and industry guilds.



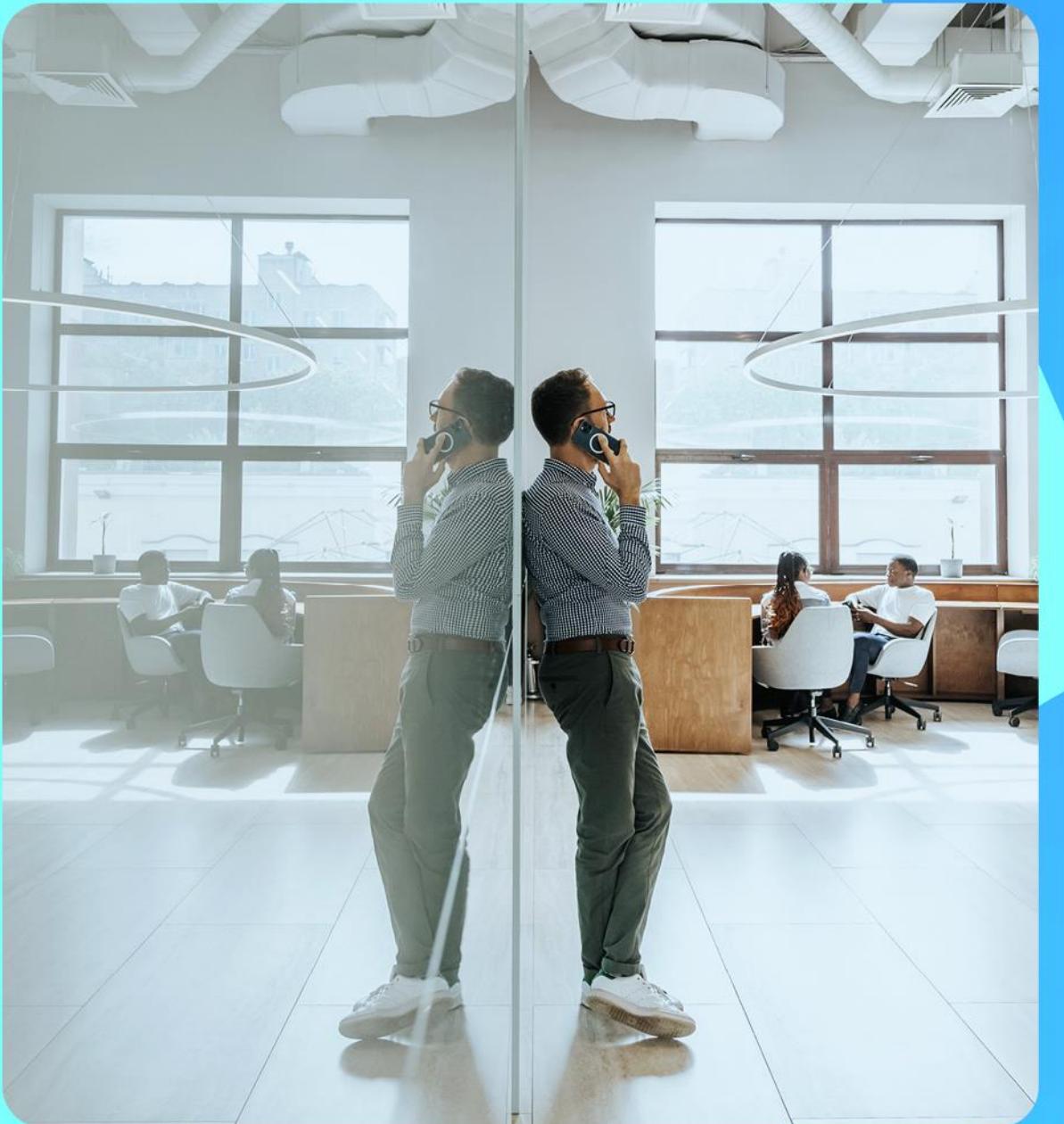
of L&D pros agree continuous learning is more important than ever for career success.<sup>1</sup>



Most workers (62%) want to pursue their career goals at their current employer.<sup>2</sup>

### >>> Today's Action

*Do you encourage and support microcredentialing and certifications for all employee levels?*



# Changing Norms

*Amidst an epidemic of social loneliness, geopolitical disruptions, and environmental stress, we are seeing the systems we know and trust hint at collapse. Current leaders yearn to turn the clock back.*



## Trend 9: RTO Mandates

In a dramatic reversal of pandemic-era policy, many multinational organizations are now mandating five-day return-to-office (RTO) policies. Some leaders are requiring employees to work in the same physical office as their teams (known as “return to team”), which represents a further reversal of distributed and remote work.

**Female employees are significantly more likely to leave post-RTO, with a turnover increase nearly 3x higher than that of male employees.<sup>1</sup>**



### Workforce Implications

While some in-person collaboration is critical for innovation, leaders who insist on rigid office attendance and who remove flexibility from work arrangements are succeeding at pruning their human workforces. Unfortunately, they can't choose who leaves, and it's often the highest performers who seek more versatile employment elsewhere.

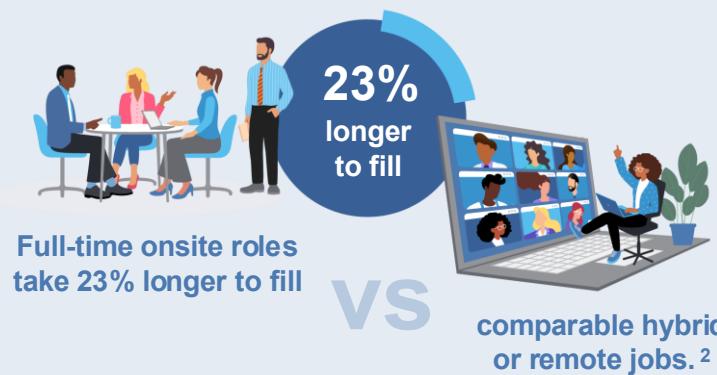
### Looking Ahead

Ongoing geopolitical and climate disruptions will render RTO virtually impossible in the 2030s. As the trailblazer millennials begin leading global companies, RTO policies will relax, and many full-time knowledge workers will return to distributed work in third places.



### » Today's Action

*Are you using your own retention and productivity data to assess the utility of RTO on a team-by-team basis?*





## Trend 10: Declining Trust

Our global society is experiencing a period of change, where established certainties and norms — such as geopolitical stability, a predictable climate, and straightforward career progression—are rapidly evolving. Both leaders and workers are struggling with less clarity around our core systems, data, and business intelligence.



**Employer trust is declining around the world, and most believe business leaders purposely mislead people.<sup>1</sup>**

### Workforce Implications

Organizations and people don't know where to turn to clearly assess what's happening in the workforce and how to sensibly proceed. When confusion and contradictory information abound, workers may suffer from decision whiplash.

### Looking Ahead

As centralized government and mainstream media continue to lose credibility, multinational conglomerates and industry groups will have an opportunity to become the next major source of trusted data and insights. We must ensure oversight of these groups so that the content they provide is objective rather than self-serving.



### Today's Action

*Do you evaluate internal data for alignment across systems, and do you communicate consistent data-driven messaging to your stakeholders?*



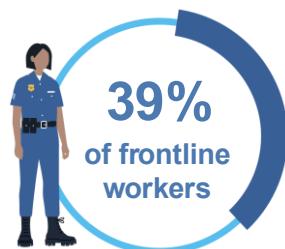
**Most people worldwide believe fake news and misinformation is a major problem in their country.<sup>2</sup>**



## Trend 11: Equity Gaps



According to a 2025 UN report, despite significant gains in poverty reduction, many people teeter on the brink even as they move up the income ladder.<sup>1</sup> While wealth and prosperity are increasingly concentrated, economic shocks, persistent inflation, and growing career instability are creating a human experience for most of us marked by fear, anger, and geopolitical polarization.



Nearly half of frontline workers are unsatisfied with their income.<sup>2</sup>



More than one-third of frontline workers need a second job to supplement their income.<sup>2</sup>



### » Today's Action

*In challenging times, how do you help your frontline and essential workforce?*



### Workforce Implications

Leaders have a responsibility to leverage pay equity and transparency strategies to ensure fair compensation across levels and functions. Individual career paths must be designed to provide family-sustaining incomes, and employers must be willing to provide holistic well-being benefits for their full-time workforces.



### Looking Ahead

Projecting the current layoff trend into the 2030s, we will see renewed interest in and execution of government-sponsored programs offering subsidies in exchange for upskilling. The macroeconomic environment could also set the stage for increased labor union activism.



## Trend 12: Power Surge

The rise of AI-driven data centers is dramatically increasing global energy consumption, as these facilities require vast amounts of electricity to support powerful algorithms and nonstop operations. This will increase the need for scalable green energy solutions and a skilled workforce to build and maintain them.

### Workforce Implications

AI budgets must account not just for the technology itself, but for the electricity and people that power it. Runaway demand may result in shortages that lead to the collapse of individual workflows and even entire systems. As outages become a regular occurrence, leaders need to create literal “backup” plans to continue with business as usual.

### Looking Ahead

Energy conservation will become a core human skill in the 2030s. Not only will the demand for utility workers increase, but the average worker’s job will involve overseeing AI-based partners and will also require smart rationing of electricity.



**By 2028, AI alone will consume as much electricity annually as nearly one-quarter of all U.S. households.<sup>1</sup>**

22%



**Most energy and utility employers say they are struggling to find the skilled talent they need.<sup>2</sup>**

76%

### Today's Action

*Are you mindful of the electricity requirements of AI-based technologies, and have you protected your core workflows against outages?*



# The Succession Crisis

*Four-year degrees no longer guarantee gainful employment, and “blue collar” jobs are gaining popularity, but the paths to them remain stigmatized and elusive. In corporations, a dearth of available leaders to oversee AI means that intermediate to advanced human expertise will be prized.*



## Trend 13: Talent Droughts

In developed nations, fertility rates have dropped below replacement levels due to later marriages, economic instability, and concern about the direction global society is taking. At the same time, the labor force participation rate continues to decrease, potentially reflecting a higher percentage of discouraged workers.



**By 2030, more than 1 in 4 workers in many advanced economies will be over age 55.<sup>1</sup>**



### Workforce Implications

While today's media coverage might point to an employer's job market, many organizations are already facing significant labor shortages – especially in industries like advanced manufacturing. We continue to create new jobs and job categories, but fewer workers with the right skillsets are available to fill open positions, and recruitment has become commoditized and demoralizing.



### Looking Ahead

By the 2030s, the large millennial generation will be holding up the global economy. A smaller Generation X and Generation Z will struggle to support an aging population amidst reduced government support. Organizations will hopefully refocus recruitment processes on a humanized candidate experience, with strategic personal touch points rather than total automation.



### » Today's Action

*How are you maintaining a steady pipeline of young workers?*



of employers worldwide say workforce aging is impacting their hiring strategy.<sup>2</sup>

1. Bain & Company 2. ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey, Q3 2025



## Trend 14: Degree Doubts

While the four-year college degree remains an entrenched global status symbol, its utility is decreasing. Unemployment and underemployment among graduates is rising due to the combination of a challenging business environment and leadership's hopes that AI can replace entry-level roles.

### Workforce Implications

Employers need to do their part to ensure new grads' preparedness for the workforce through earlier engagement with college students. They also need to be willing to invest in new grad upskilling and mentorship, and to think flexibly about the level of postsecondary education required for a given role.

### Looking Ahead

An increased emphasis on secondary school-initiated work-based learning in this decade is likely to lead to more Gen Z-ers choosing full-time paths in the skilled trades and in gig careers in the 2030s. Their post-secondary education will be more fluid and ongoing, and tied directly to skill acquisition and the business objectives of their current organizations.



**The employment gap between degree and non-degree holders is the narrowest in 30 years.<sup>1</sup>**



### Today's Action

*Where are you sourcing young talent, and do your requirements for the entry-level still make sense for the work?*



**More than half of Gen Z workers worry automation will replace their roles in the next two years.<sup>2</sup>**



## Trend 15: Brain Drains

While the projected brain drain of the 2010s was staved off by economic recession, delayed retirements, and more flexible workforce participation among aging Baby Boomers, we still lack a cohesive infrastructure for protecting and transferring the knowledge of experienced human workers with judgment and expertise that can only be developed through decades of seeing it all.

### Workforce Implications

The pandemic-era flexible work trend benefited both aging Baby Boomers and the organizations that wished to leverage their talent on a part-time or subject matter expert basis. Today, we see the rise of gig careers among retired full-timers, as well as an increase in the hiring of fractional executives who serve multiple companies.



57%

of workers say they have never worked with a mentor at their current employer.<sup>1</sup>

### Looking Ahead

Smart organizations will leverage AI to capture, analyze, and derive insights from data provided by retiring senior talent. The preservation of legacy systems might be used to help human workers manage human and machine hybrid teams and to further train AI models.



### Today's Action

*What does the process of retirement look like in your organization, and is knowledge being transferred in the most effective way?*



Most employers worldwide (57%) say workforce aging is impacting their current HR strategy.<sup>2</sup>



## Trend 16: Leadership Wanes



In the AI age, organizations seek talent with the context and experience to understand when technology is right, when it's wrong, and how it should be deployed for maximum effectiveness. However, the next generation of senior leaders, Generation X, is quite small, and younger middle manager millennials are struggling with competing life priorities and burnout.

### Workforce Implications

The demand for senior leaders who can serve as trusted advisors, in both a full-time and contract capacity, will grow rapidly between 2026-30. Generation X-ers will be at a numerical advantage, but still need to continuously upskill to ensure their AI and other emerging technology skills are up to par.

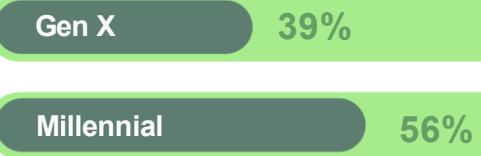
### Looking Ahead

The 2030s senior leader will look dramatically different than c-suiters in years past. This leader may have a non-traditional career path and a more eclectic skillset, and they are likely to have higher emotional intelligence, advanced management capabilities, and a comprehensive understanding of the unique strengths of human workers versus machine partners.



### » Today's Action

*How are you reconfiguring your mid-to-senior level roles to attract more Generation X and Millennial candidates?*



**Only 39% of Generation X and 56% of Millennial workers say they aspire to become a manager or leader.<sup>1</sup>**

Developed by:

**Work  
Intelligence  
Lab**  
by ManpowerGroup®

# Global Expertise to Navigate the Future of Work

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## Forward-Looking Statements

This report contains forward-looking statements, including statements regarding labor demand in certain regions, countries and industries, economic uncertainty and the use and impact of AI in the global labor market. Actual events or results may differ materially from those contained in the forward-looking statements, due to risks, uncertainties and assumptions. These factors include those found in the Company's reports filed with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), including the information under the heading "Risk Factors" in its Annual Report on Form 10-K for the year ended December 31, 2024, whose information is incorporated herein by reference. ManpowerGroup disclaims any obligation to update any forward-looking or other statements in this release, except as required by law.



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