Delivering Talent Agility: Six Key Asks From Global Business Leaders

The world is increasingly complex, and the economic and business outlook are somewhat uncertain, accelerated by digitally-driven change, and with an array of business challenges to navigate.

But challenging as this may sound, this environment brings the potential for tremendous opportunity. For leaders in HR, Reward, Talent, Workforce and Mobility this evolving landscape is an opportunity to shape the global workforce, using new technologies to augment the human workforce. An agile talent pool can be key to accessing new markets and developing new products and services.

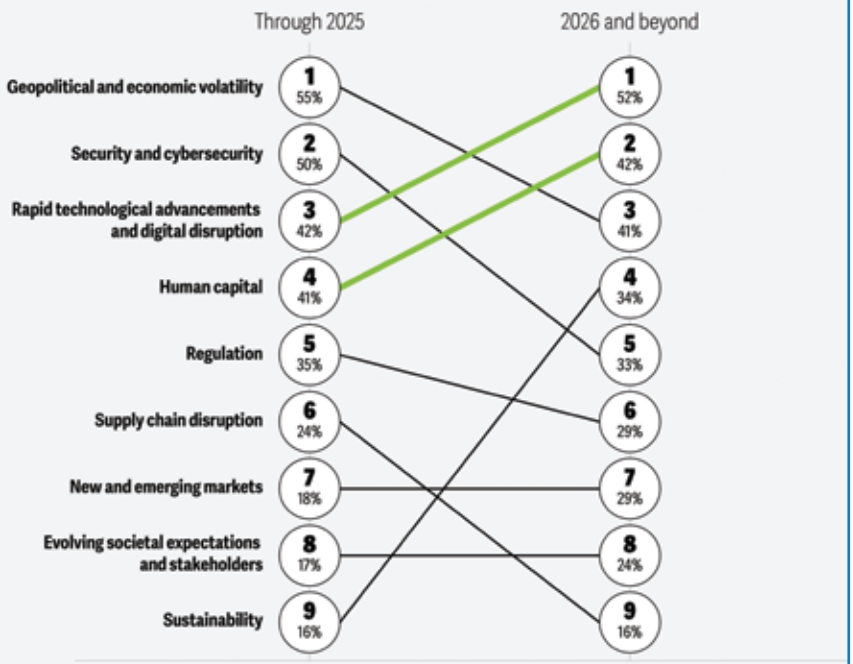
It is this potential that the Board and the C-suite have prioritised for 2026 and beyond according to the most recent Deloitte Global Board and C-suite resilience survey. As you will see from the responses in Figure 1, being prepared for rapid technological advancements and digital disruptions is the top priority for the Board and the C-suite. Having the right human capital is their second priority, followed by geopolitical and economic volatility. Whilst geopolitical and economic climate is a top 5 concern, the Board and C-suite do not want short-term focus on this to constrain longer-term growth.

To deliver on these priorities, the Board and C-suite indicate that they need an organisation that is agile, which sounds logical in theory.

Figure 1

Short-term versus long-term planning: Respondent priorities shift toward tech advancements and human capital in 2026 and beyond

Emerging trends or potential disruptions receiving the most board/C-suite attention (percentage of respondents)



Notes: n = 739. Respondents were asked to choose their top three concerns.

Source: Deloitte Global Board and C-suite Resilience survey, June 2025.

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But words like 'agility' can mean everything and nothing, so we wanted to understand, as tangibly as possible, what they wanted when they asked for talent agility.

To gain this insight, in a survey conducted in collaboration with Raconteur, we asked 822 business leaders globally for their thoughts in three key areas:

1. What do they see as the role of a global workforce in delivering business success, now and in the future?
2. What do they believe is needed at an operational level to tap into an agile global workforce? and
3. What are they willing to do to support their teams who manage their global workforce?

Based on their responses we have condensed the desire for talent agility into six key asks of the business. In essence, these asks are based on business leaders looking for the best talent and skills for their organisations across the globe. And they realise that for their asks to be successful, there will need to a significant shift in approach from where they are now.

Ask 1 – Champion Cross-Border Talent

The first ask is for more cross-border talent. This is in direct contradiction to the somewhat protectionist trends that we have seen in global immigration regulation recently, due to business leader actions being dictated by macrotrends such as aging populations in the west, AI skills that are currently concentrated in certain locations and geopolitical and climate challenges that may potentially impact business continuity.

In fact, an overwhelming 95% of leaders believe that cross-border talent – accessed physically and virtually – will be key to delivering business success now and in the future. This is great news for those who work in this field, but the same leaders have told us that there is a significant gap between the importance of cross-border talent and their approach to it. 75% of them tell us that they are currently static, reactive or only making incremental progress in their approach.

The key is to understand business leaders' perspectives. How critical do they think global talent is and what are they willing to do to ensure that talent can be accessed, developed and deployed globally, now and in the future?

Ask 2 – Prepare For Greater Employee Autonomy

There has been a lot of debate over the last five to six years on whether organisations are looking to provide their employees with greater autonomy – on when, how and where work is done. Recent headlines suggest that the trend is a return to the office, especially for certain sectors. But with the rise of AI we are also seeing predictions of a move away from traditional employment and talent models like fractional working, portfolio careers and new ways of engaging with talent.

We wanted to understand if business leaders see autonomy as a short-term focus or a way of developing careers that is here to stay. Based on the business leaders second ask it appears to be very much here to stay. Respondents anticipate that employee autonomy will be three times the level that it is today by 2030.

But for autonomy to increase, a massive cultural and operational shift is required from where we are today. When we asked the leaders about the factors influencing their cross-border talent agility strategy they ranked workforce flexibility and agility in 10th place (out of 10 options). But the reality is without flexibility and agility there can be no true employee autonomy.

People leaders will have a key role to play in gaining clarity on what autonomy will look like within their organisations. Will it be working flexible hours, choosing flexible career paths, choosing different employment and talent models, working in different locations or a combination of all of these? Regulation can feel like it is changing faster than ever, thus, compliant autonomy especially across borders will require the right framework - policies, roles, technologies, processes etc. - and talent professionals are perfectly placed to help deliver this.

Ask 3 – Adopt Talent Intelligence

The quest for the best talent, irrespective of where it is, has seen a focus on data and AI-powered technology in workforce, HR and talent over the past two to three years. Specifically, there has been a lot of thought and activity on platforms providing talent intelligence and creating talent marketplaces. We sought to get business leaders' insights on the role data and technology will play in enabling talent agility – which brings us to the third ask. Almost 99% of business leaders believe that talent intelligence platforms will become the norm over the next five years. If used correctly, talent intelligence and digital technology can enable organisations to make better informed decisions globally, on recruitment, talent development, and workforce planning. So, we can fully understand why leaders believe it is key to the future.

But the gap here is big. Even though 99% of leaders believe they have or will have platforms that facilitate talent intelligence – 52% of them still feel they have no visibility of what skills are available in their organisation. We know that even if leaders were to have access to the right data, talent demand and supply data without a regulatory overlay does not tell the full story.

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HR, Reward, Talent, Workforce and Mobility practitioners have a clear role in understanding the talent intelligence data and platforms deployed within their organisations and posing appropriate questions to ensure optimal impact. Is technology alone the solution to organisational talent intelligence requirements? Jobs, skills, experience and competence data is nuanced and in certain cases requires on the ground research. If technology is the solution, have they adopted an appropriate platform? Does it hold the right data? How is that data being utilised? How are these platforms set up to manage bias? How are regulatory considerations being factored in?

Ask 4 – Pivot To Skills-Based Strategies

The fourth ask to enable agility focuses on transitioning to skills-based strategies. Much like talent intelligence, there has been a lot of talk about skills-based organisations over the past few years among HR and talent professionals, so we wanted to understand if business leaders believe this is the future, and it turned out that 60% of them feel that their organisations will be skills-based within five-years.

In theory, with the rise of digitisation, tasks are being automated and the role of humans is changing faster than ever. Thus, education, competence and experience will no longer be sufficient to assess suitability for a role, and this is where skills have a part to play. But as anyone who has been involved in this transition will know, it is a complex challenge, often with no clear skills taxonomy and no common means or methodology to assess them. While a number of organisations have commenced this transition, most are still on their transformation journey, thus it is no surprise that 74% of organisations are yet to start the process of becoming skills-based. There is a lot of aspiration, but a lot of work yet to be done in this area.

It is not only organisations that are adapting to becoming skills-based. We are witnessing country legislation, such as immigration regulation, responding to the changing world and formalising skills requirements for entry. Currently each organisation and each regulatory body have a different taxonomy, and formal skills passports are typically at the pilot stage. Those in people-related leadership will have a critical role to play in understanding the skills required by the organisation, mapping them to regulatory requirements and determining if and how skills can be accessed compliantly across borders.

Ask 5 – Invest In Human Skills To Fuel Success In The AI-Powered Future

The fifth ask is confirmation of what we have heard several times – that while the future will be AI-powered, AI will require human skills like empathy, resilience, adaptability and emotional intelligence to augment it. And while business leaders recognise the need for these human skills, only 50% of them are confident that they will be able to access these skills in five-years' time. This is a perfect opportunity for HR, Reward, Talent, Workforce and Mobility. Firstly, to help the wider enterprise be ready to source these skills from across the world. Secondly, for cross-border work to be used as a tool to build the human skills that are so critical for the future, because research shows that those who have worked across cultures are highly likely to have developed these critical skills as a result of their experience.

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We are also starting to see the rise of technology/AI platforms that will help review current processes, along with business and technology strategies and to determine the tasks that may be automated in the future versus tasks that will still require human capabilities. Like all digital tools, to gain valuable outputs we require as close to 100% accuracy in data inputs, which can be extremely rare in the real world. Talent and Workforce teams need to ensure that the nuances and complexities of work processes are not lost when technology is applied to analyse their future at scale whilst also proactively identifying manual work that should be automated to successfully transition to the future.

Ask 6 – Overcome Structural And Cultural Rigidity To Retain Talent

The sixth and final ask is the result of us asking business leaders about the support system they need to help them achieve desired business outcomes. As we know from the previous five topics, business leaders see the value in greater cross-border talent, support enhanced employee autonomy, believe talent intelligence and technology will deliver benefit and support their pivot to being more skills-based. They also see a future with an optimal mix of human and AI skills. Not too much to strive for!

71% of business leaders accept that to deliver all of their asks will require a future workforce strategy that is data-led and that provides a high level of personalisation in career paths and learning. A strategy that will require HR, workforce, talent and mobility functions to work cohesively with the business. People have been trying to work across functions for years and it is easier said than done for most of us. There is a clear reason for that – because even today only 15% of business leaders want to prioritise the transformation of their talent, workforce and HR functions. And we know that without proper buy-in and commitment from leadership, structural changes to the way we work across functions can be very difficult to achieve. But this low score could potentially be because business leaders believe that a significant amount of the transformation, particularly when it comes to technology and data, has already been achieved.

We hope that our findings provide you with insights that will help you as a people-function leader engage with your wider business leadership, helping them understand the current gap in delivering true talent agility, and to continue being an ambassador for change, now and in the future.

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Further Reading:

www.raconteur.net/tag/talent-agility
www.deloitte.com/global/en/services/tax/research/new-age-of-talent-agility.html
www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/leadership/building-organizational-resilience.html

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Deloitte's dedicated Global Talent & Mobility practice is a multi-disciplinary group of tax, immigration, talent, HR and digital professionals who support clients as they navigate complex global workforce challenges, developing focused strategies and delivering practical enablement.
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