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Middle East  
Human Capital Trends 2025

# Is there still value in the role of Managers?

**For most organizations, the value is not found in eliminating the role – or ignoring the need for change**

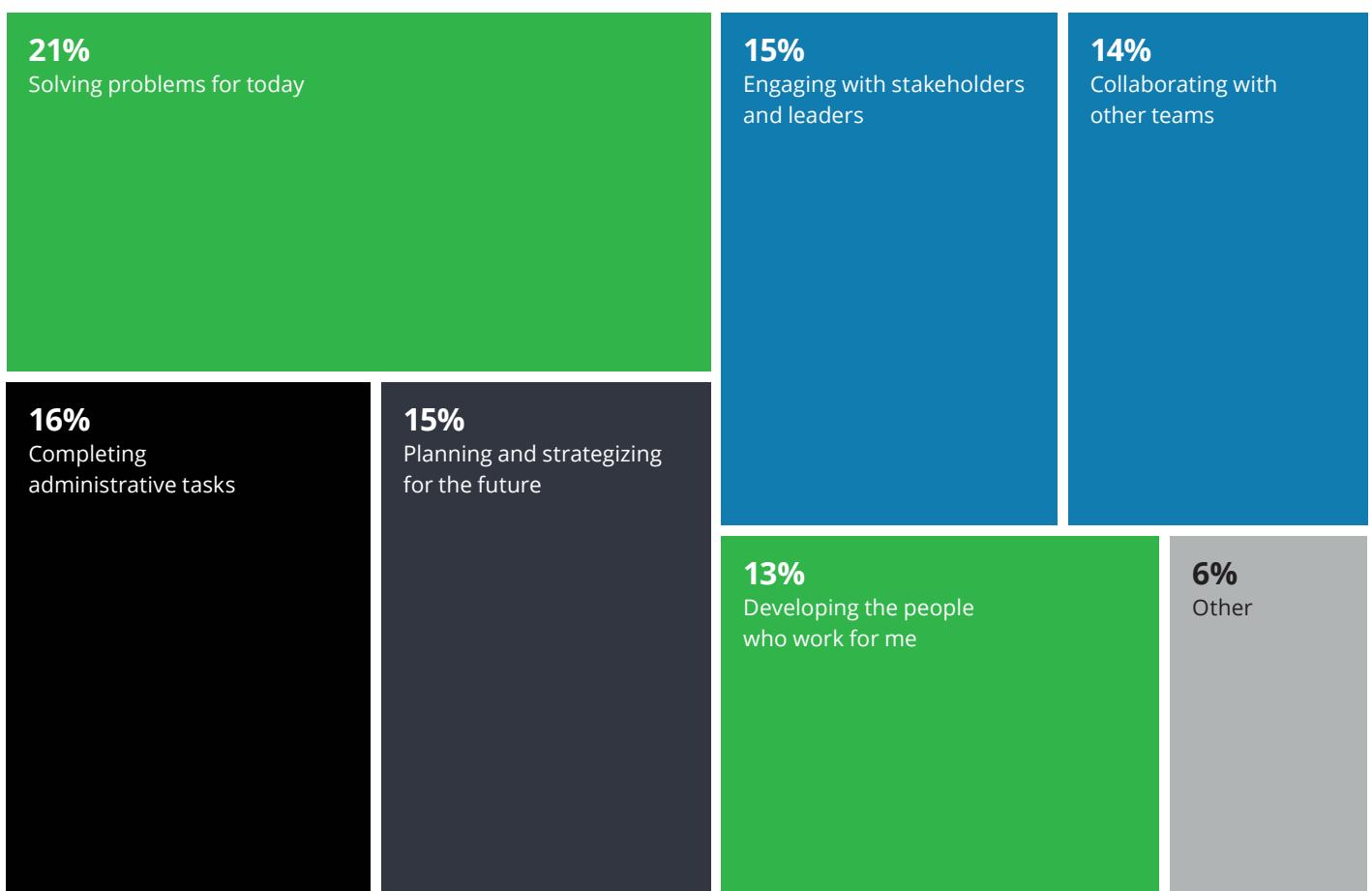
*Charlie Casella*

As workplaces transform under the influence of AI, flatter hierarchies, and evolving workforce expectations, the role of the manager is facing a necessary and urgent reinvention. Managers—once seen primarily as overseers of process—are increasingly expected to be culture carriers, people developers, and strategic connectors. Yet, in many organizations, they are being asked to meet these expanded expectations without the clarity, development, or tools to succeed.

Deloitte's 2025 Global Human Capital Trends report highlights a sobering disconnect: 73% of organizations believe reinventing the manager role is important, but only 7% report significant progress<sup>1</sup>. Nearly 40% of managers' time is still consumed by administrative work, leaving limited capacity for coaching, collaboration, or innovation.

## **Where are managers currently spending their time? Mostly on administrative tasks and tackling today's problems**

Percent of time respondents spend on the following categories of work



Source: Analysis of Deloitte's 2025 Global Human Capital Trends survey data.

This paradox is also present in the Middle East, where rapid national transformation agendas—such as Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia, Smart Government initiatives in the UAE, and broader regional modernization strategies—demand more from managers than ever before. And yet, many feel constrained by traditional role definitions that emphasize oversight over empowerment.

### A fragmented role: What managers are facing and feeling

For many mid-level leaders, the manager role today feels disjointed. Pulled between strategic execution, operational efficiency, employee wellbeing, and digital enablement, managers face increasing pressure with limited support.

"We're expected to deliver strategy, support wellbeing, and adopt new platforms—often without the time or clarity to grow into those responsibilities."— *UAE-based operations manager*<sup>2</sup>

This is not an isolated experience. A 2023 Bayt.com and YouGov survey found that 61% of mid-level professionals in the UAE and Saudi Arabia feel underprepared for the evolving demands of leadership<sup>3</sup>. Traditional definitions of management—grounded in control, process, and hierarchy—are being outpaced by expectations for coaching, empathy, and agility.

### Why support falls short

Even as organizations acknowledge the need to reinvent management, barriers remain entrenched:

- **Legacy models of control:** Many businesses continue to associate good management with control, compliance, and task oversight. As a result, development efforts often focus on operational excellence rather than human leadership, despite new expectations being squarely focused on collaboration, coaching, and culture.
- **Investment imbalance:** Managerial development is frequently overshadowed by digital investment on the one hand, and C-suite leadership programs on the other. Middle managers are the largest leadership population in most organizations, yet they are often left out of transformation budgets and capability planning.
- **Inflexible structures:** Hierarchical designs and outdated job grading systems do not reflect the fluid, cross-functional nature of modern work. Managers are still promoted based on tenure or functional success, rather than readiness to lead in complexity. This makes it difficult to redefine or personalize development pathways.

In the Middle East, where change is fast-moving and expectations are high, these gaps can quickly lead to burnout.

### Reinventing management: Three levers for change

Reinvention does not mean removal. It means realignment—of time, development, and expectations. Deloitte's global research, as well as regional examples across the GCC, point to three core areas where organizations can drive meaningful change:

#### 1. Free up time to lead

Today's managers are bogged down by approvals, compliance tasks, and reporting. Reclaiming their time is essential. This starts with using automation and AI dashboards to eliminate low-value tasks—freeing managers to focus on what matters: people, coaching, and performance.

#### 2. Build judgment through experience

Judgment is emerging as the core capability for managers—especially the ability to lead in uncertainty, balance empathy with accountability, and drive performance with nuance. This is not taught through instruction. It is built through practice: real-world scenarios, feedback loops, and mentoring that encourage reflection and decision-making in complexity.

#### 3. Redesign development for relevance and resilience

Today's leadership challenges require modern learning journeys—modular, contextual, and tailored to personal growth. Managers need support in systems thinking, emotional intelligence, hybrid team leadership, and cultural fluency—not just technical proficiency.

These actions work best when embedded within structural transformation: new metrics, new workflows, and new mindsets about what manager success looks like.

### Reinvention in action

Several organizations across the Middle East are already demonstrating what this shift can look like in practice—aligning their approach with the core reinvention levers outlined above.

#### Freeing time through AI enablement

Faced with mounting administrative demands on its people leaders, Emirates NBD deployed AI-enabled HR dashboards that provide real-time insights into team performance, wellbeing, and productivity. The goal: reduce the time managers spend generating reports or requesting updates and empower them to coach and connect more deeply.

This shift is grounded in the belief that AI should augment—not replace—human leadership. The initiative led to a 15% increase in people manager satisfaction and boosted internal talent mobility, according to the bank's 2023 Annual Report<sup>4</sup>.

## Building judgment for complexity

Recognizing that public sector managers needed not only policy knowledge but also systems leadership capabilities, the Qatar Civil Service and Government Development Bureau launched the “New Manager Mindset” initiative. This program focuses on developing foresight, judgment, and adaptive decision-making as core managerial capabilities.

It is directly tied to the country’s broader transformation agenda, aiming to equip public leaders with the tools to translate long-term vision into near-term impact. Since its launch, more than 900 managers have completed the program, contributing to a 26% increase in employee trust scores<sup>5</sup>.

## Human-centered leadership

The Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority (ECA), in partnership with New York University Abu Dhabi and international experts, launched a leadership development program focused on empathy, relational intelligence, and values-driven leadership. This initiative recognizes that modern managers need to build trust, lead diverse teams, and make inclusive decisions—all anchored in human-centered values.

Announced publicly in 2023, the program reflects the UAE’s broader push to build resilient, people-centric public institutions<sup>6</sup>.

## Conclusion: Redefining the role that translates strategy into action

Managers are not obsolete—they are critical. But they must be enabled, not just expected, to lead differently. These regional examples demonstrate that when organizations take action—freeing time, building judgment, and reimagining development—the role of the manager can evolve into a powerful driver of resilience, innovation, and transformation.

For organizations seeking to reinvent the manager role, the following strategies are key to keep in mind:

- **Empower with time and tools:** Use AI and automation to streamline routine tasks and reporting. Reclaim managerial bandwidth for human leadership activities like coaching, collaboration, and development.
- **Treat judgment as a developable skill:** Create immersive learning environments that replicate the ambiguity and pressure of real decision-making. Use peer coaching, simulations, and scenario-based learning to build deep capability.
- **Rebuild development for today’s challenges:** Move beyond one-size-fits-all training. Offer modular, experiential learning journeys that build relational intelligence, cultural fluency, and strategic agility.

- **Measure what really matters:** Redefine manager success metrics to include team trust, wellbeing, inclusion, and innovation—not just task completion or compliance.

- **Position managers as co-creators of transformation:** Involve them early in change efforts. Give them context, tools, and authority to lead change—not just execute it.

In an era where strategy must be lived every day—not just designed at the top—the manager remains the indispensable bridge between vision and action. In the Middle East, where transformation is fast and expectations are high, reinventing this role is not a luxury—it is a necessity.

## Research methodology

The survey for the Deloitte 2025 Global Human Capital Trends report polled nearly 10,000 business and human resources leaders across many industries and sectors in 93 countries, including across the Middle East region. In addition to the broad, global survey that provides the foundational data for the Global Human Capital Trends report, Deloitte supplemented its research this year with worker-, manager- and executive-specific surveys to uncover where there may be gaps between leader and manager perception and worker realities. The survey data is complemented by more than 25 interviews with executives from some of today’s leading organizations. These insights helped shape the trends in this report.

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Deloitte (2025) 2025 Global Human Capital Trends Report.

[Online] Available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/insights/focus/human-capital-trends.html>

<sup>2</sup> Emirates HR (2024) Podcast Interview: Leading Through Ambiguity.

[Audio] Available at: <https://emiratesshr.com/podcast>

<sup>3</sup> Bayt.com & YouGov (2023) Middle East Managerial Capability Survey.

[Online] Available at: <https://www.bayt.com/en/research-reports>

<sup>4</sup> Emirates NBD (2023) Annual Report 2023.

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<sup>5</sup> CSGDB (2025) Qatar Civil Service Bureau launches public sector leadership initiative.

[Online] Available at: <https://www.csgdb.gov.qa>

<sup>6</sup> Abu Dhabi Government Media Office (2023) Early Childhood Authority launches new leadership development programme.

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