



Middle East
Human Capital Trends 2026

Decisions that echo

As organizations reshape work, skills, and opportunity, how can leaders ensure their decisions strengthen not only enterprise performance, but society itself?

—By Hassan Rimmani

For much of the last century, leadership was judged primarily by organizational outcomes:

- Did the company grow?
- Did productivity improve?
- Did profits increase?

These questions remain important. But they are no longer sufficient.

Today, leadership decisions increasingly create consequences that extend far beyond the boundaries of the organization itself:

- A decision about artificial intelligence affects how employees develop skills.
- A decision about workforce design influences career pathways and employability.
- A decision about flexibility shapes participation in the workforce.
- A decision about learning and development affects the future capability of entire talent pools.

In an increasingly interconnected world, organizational decisions no longer stop at the edge of the enterprise: they echo far beyond it.

This challenge is particularly relevant across the Middle East where workforce transformation sits at the heart of national development agendas. Across the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, governments are investing heavily in digital transformation, economic diversification, capability building, and future workforce development. As a result, organizations in this region are not merely responding to change—they are helping shape the future of their societies.²¹⁴¹⁶

This represents a profound shift in the role of leadership. Historically, organizations were often viewed primarily as economic institutions. Their responsibility was to create value for shareholders, customers, and employees. Today, expectations are broader.

Organizations are increasingly expected to contribute to national capability, workforce resilience, economic participation, and long-term social progress. Their decisions influence not only business performance, but also how people experience work, develop skills, and navigate an increasingly uncertain future.

The upshot is that the most consequential leadership decisions are increasingly judged by the impact they create beyond their organizations.



Why organizational decisions matter more than ever

The Middle East region provides a powerful illustration of this shift. Across the region, workforce strategy and economic strategy have become deeply interconnected.

In the UAE, the Digital Economy Strategy seeks to accelerate economic diversification and position technology and talent as central drivers of future competitiveness.² Saudi Arabia's Human Capability Development Program places workforce readiness, lifelong learning, and talent development at the centre of Vision 2030's ambitions.⁴ Meanwhile, Qatar's Digital Agenda frames digital transformation as a catalyst not only for economic growth, but for broader societal development and future readiness.⁶

However, these ambitions cannot be achieved by governments alone, they depend on organizations.

Increasingly, major employers across the region are becoming active participants in national transformation efforts. They are investing in skills, redesigning work, developing future leaders, and creating pathways for workforce participation at scale. Organizations such as ADNOC, Aramco, and QatarEnergy have all positioned workforce capability, talent development, and future readiness as strategic priorities alongside operational performance.^{3,5,7}

This matters because organizational decisions now have multiplier effects. When leaders invest in workforce development, they strengthen national capability. When they create opportunities for learning and growth, they improve labor market resilience. When they adopt technology responsibly, they influence how society experiences innovation. And when they fail to do these things, the consequences can extend well beyond their own workforce.

Three ways leadership decisions echo beyond the enterprise

If organizational decisions increasingly shape outcomes beyond the enterprise, where are those effects most visible? Across the Middle East, three areas of leadership decision-making stand out as creating ripple effects that extend far beyond immediate business outcomes.

Building capability

Perhaps the most enduring impact an organization can have is on the capabilities of its people. Every decision about hiring, development, learning, mobility, mentoring, and workforce planning shapes not only current performance, but future readiness. This has become particularly important as technological change accelerates.

Across the region, organizations are investing heavily in artificial intelligence, automation, and digital transformation. Yet technology alone does not create competitive advantage. Competitive advantage comes from the ability of people to adapt, learn, and apply new capabilities in changing environments. This means that workforce development is no longer simply an HR priority, rather it is a strategic investment in future capability.

Organizations that create opportunities for continuous learning help employees remain relevant in a rapidly changing labor market. In doing so, they strengthen not only their own workforce, but the broader talent ecosystem upon which future economic growth depends.

Skills developed within one organization often flow into others. Employees carry knowledge, experience, and capabilities with them throughout their careers. Investments in learning therefore create value that compounds over time and across industries. The most forward-looking organizations understand this dynamic. They do not view capability-building as a cost of doing business but instead see it as a contribution to future prosperity.

Strengthening trust

Leadership decisions also shape trust. Trust influences how employees experience work, how customers engage with organizations, and how societies respond to change.

In an era characterized by rapid technological advancement, uncertainty, and transformation, trust has become an increasingly valuable organizational asset. Employees want confidence that decisions are fair. Customers want confidence that technology is being used responsibly. Communities want confidence that organizations are contributing positively to society.

These expectations place greater responsibility on leaders. Decisions relating to artificial intelligence, workforce transformation, flexibility, performance management, and organizational change are no longer judged solely by their outcomes. They are increasingly judged by how they are made. Transparency, accountability, and responsible leadership therefore become critical.

Organizations that build trust create resilience. They are better positioned to navigate disruption, sustain engagement, and maintain legitimacy during periods of significant change. While trust as a concept may sometimes feel intangible, its effects are profoundly tangible. If weakened, it becomes difficult to rebuild. But if strengthened, it enables rapid adaptation.

Expanding opportunity

A third way leadership decisions echo beyond the enterprise is through opportunity. Organizations play a significant role in determining who participates in the workforce, how careers develop, and who has access to pathways for growth.

Every hiring decision creates access... or limits it. Every development program broadens opportunity... or concentrates it. Every workplace policy influences who can contribute and under what conditions.

This is particularly relevant across the Middle East, where economic diversification and workforce participation remain central priorities. Organizations increasingly have opportunities to expand access for young people entering the workforce, women seeking greater participation, and individuals navigating new career transitions in an evolving economy.

When leaders design systems that broaden access to opportunity, the impact extends beyond individual employees: Families, communities and entire economies benefit. This is why organizational decisions carry significance far beyond immediate business outcomes. They help determine who is prepared for the future and who is left behind.

Taken together, these three areas reveal a broader truth: leadership decisions are no longer confined to organizational performance. Indeed, they increasingly shape capability, trust, and opportunity across society itself, which means leadership carries a broader responsibility than ever before.

Leading beyond organizational boundaries

If leadership decisions increasingly influence capability, trust, and opportunity beyond the enterprise, then leaders themselves may need to adopt a broader perspective. The revised focus should revolve around understanding how performance is created and the wider impact that leadership decisions have on employees, communities, and future generations of workers. This requires three important shifts.

Think systemically

Many leadership decisions are still evaluated primarily through an organizational lens.

- Will this improve productivity?
- Will it reduce costs?
- Will it increase efficiency?

While these questions remain important, leaders must also consider the broader systems within which their organizations operate.

- How will this decision affect workforce readiness?
- How will it influence talent availability in the future?
- How might it shape trust, participation, or social mobility?

The most effective leaders recognize that organizations do not operate in isolation. They are part of interconnected ecosystems that include employees, educational institutions, communities, industries, and governments.

Thinking systemically means understanding that organizational success and societal success are becoming increasingly intertwined.

Invest in capability as infrastructure

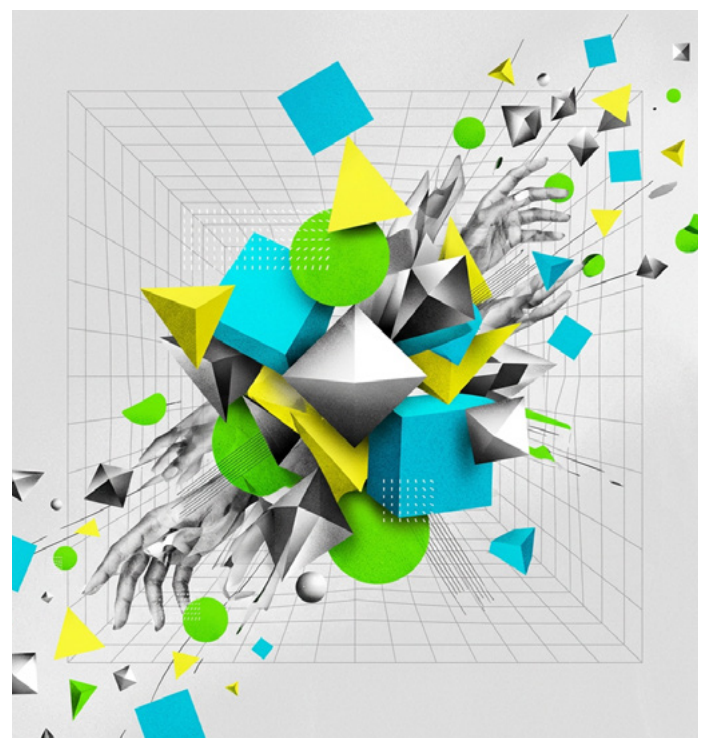
Traditionally, organizations have viewed capability-building as a workforce initiative, but increasingly, it should be viewed as infrastructure.

Just as physical infrastructure supports economic growth, human capability supports organizational resilience, innovation, and future competitiveness. This is particularly important in a world where skills are evolving faster than ever before.

Organizations cannot assume that capabilities developed today will remain sufficient tomorrow. Continuous learning, reskilling, and workforce adaptability are becoming essential components of long-term success.

Forward-looking organizations are therefore moving beyond episodic training programs and investing in cultures of continuous development.

They recognize that capability is not simply an asset to be consumed but a resource that must be continually renewed. And in doing so, they create value that extends well beyond the boundaries of the enterprise itself.



Design for long-term impact

The pressures facing leaders today are often immediate: Market expectations, operational demands, financial performance and technological disruption.

Yet many of the most consequential leadership decisions produce effects that only become visible over time. For example:

- A decision about workforce development may shape careers for years.
- A decision about technology adoption may influence organizational culture long after implementation.
- A decision about inclusion or flexibility may alter who participates in the workforce and how opportunities are distributed.

The challenge for leaders is therefore balancing short-term performance with long-term impact. Organizations that focus exclusively on immediate outcomes may achieve efficiency gains while inadvertently weakening capability, trust, or resilience.

Organizations that consider longer-term consequences are often better positioned to create sustainable value. Instead of the false choice between performance and purpose, leaders should recognize that, increasingly, the two are inseparable.

Together, these shifts point toward a broader evolution in leadership itself. The leaders who thrive in the coming decade are unlikely to be those who focus solely on organizational outcomes. They will be those who understand how their decisions shape the wider systems in which their organizations operate and who act accordingly.

Conclusion: Leadership leaves a legacy

Ultimately, the most important leadership decisions are rarely confined to the organization that makes them. Increasingly, they help determine how societies adapt to a future defined by technological change, demographic shifts, and evolving workforce expectations.

Across the region, organizations are playing an increasingly important role in national transformation. Their decisions influence not only business performance, but also the future capability, resilience, and prosperity of the communities they serve.

Success can no longer be measured solely by what an organization achieves for itself. It must also be considered in terms of the value it creates for others.

Leading in this environment requires organizations to:

- **Think beyond the enterprise:** Recognize that organizational decisions increasingly shape outcomes across broader workforce and societal ecosystems.
- **Build capability for the future:** Invest in skills, learning, and adaptability as foundations of long-term resilience and prosperity.
- **Create impact that endures:** Balance immediate performance objectives with the longer-term consequences leadership decisions create for people, communities, and future generations.

The organizations that matter most in the coming decades will be those whose decisions create value that endures beyond the enterprise itself. Leadership will ultimately be measured not only by the results it delivers today, but by the legacy it leaves behind tomorrow.

And the most consequential decisions are often the ones whose impact continues to echo long after the decision itself has been made.

Research Methodology

Deloitte's 2026 Global Human Capital Trends worked in collaboration with Oxford Economics to survey more than 3,000 business and human resources leaders across multiple industries and sectors in 15 countries. In addition to the broad, global survey that provides the foundational data for the 2026 Global Human Capital Trends report, Deloitte supplemented its research with surveys of 6,000 workers, managers and executives to uncover where there may be gaps between leader and manager perception and worker realities. The survey data is complemented by more than 50 interviews with executives and subject matter experts from some of today's leading organizations. These insights helped shape the trends in this report.

Endnotes

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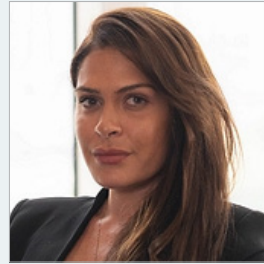
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