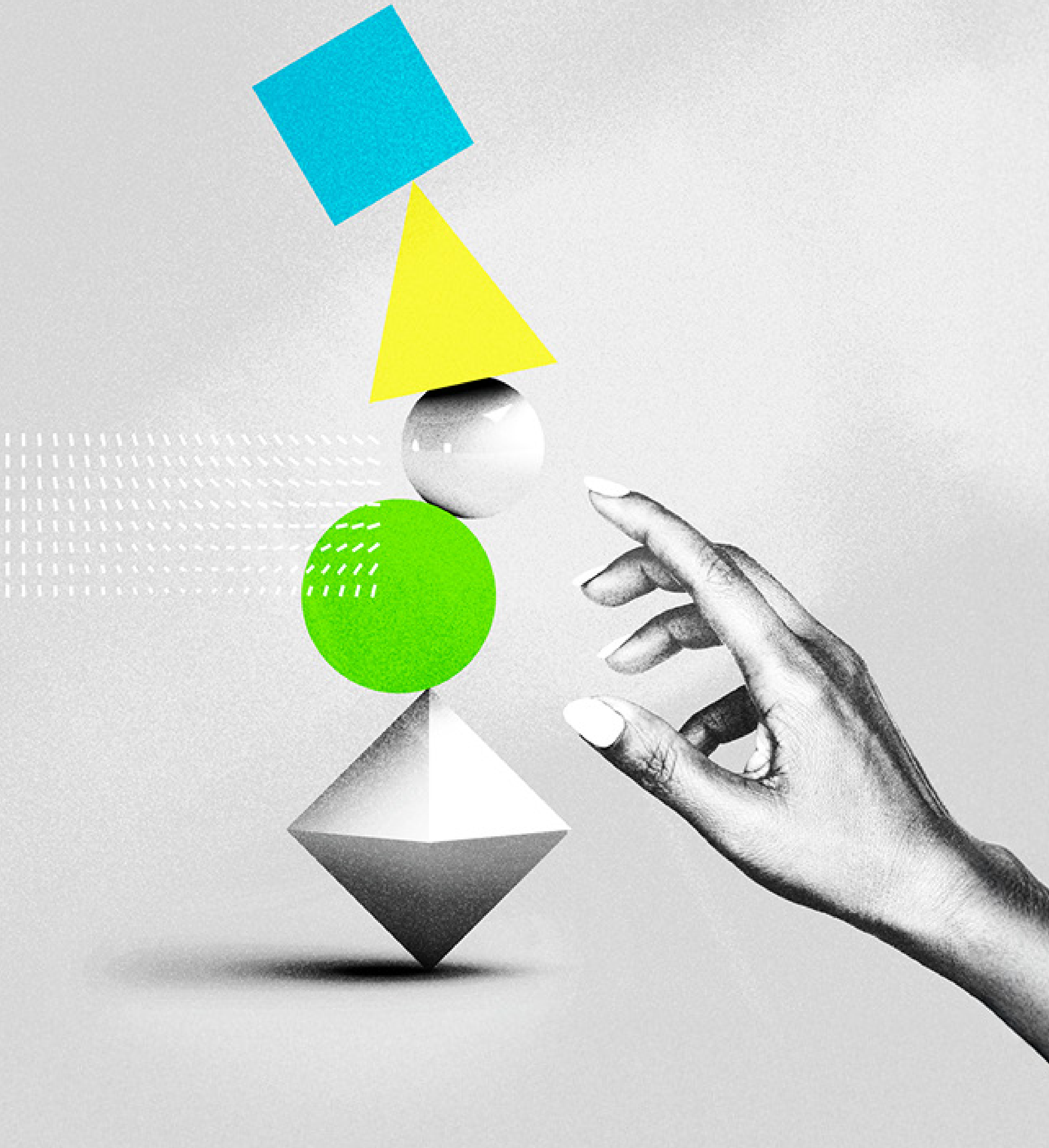
Deloitte.

Together makes progress



Middle East
Human Capital Trends 2026

Staying relevant in a world that won't sit still

Why adaptability is becoming the defining capability of successful organizations

—By Osama Khayat

For much of modern business history, relevance had a relatively long shelf-life. Organizations could build successful operating models, develop workforce capabilities, establish market positions, and expect those advantages to endure for years—sometimes decades. Change certainly happened, but it often arrived in waves. Businesses had time to react, adapt, and reposition themselves. Today, that assumption is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain.

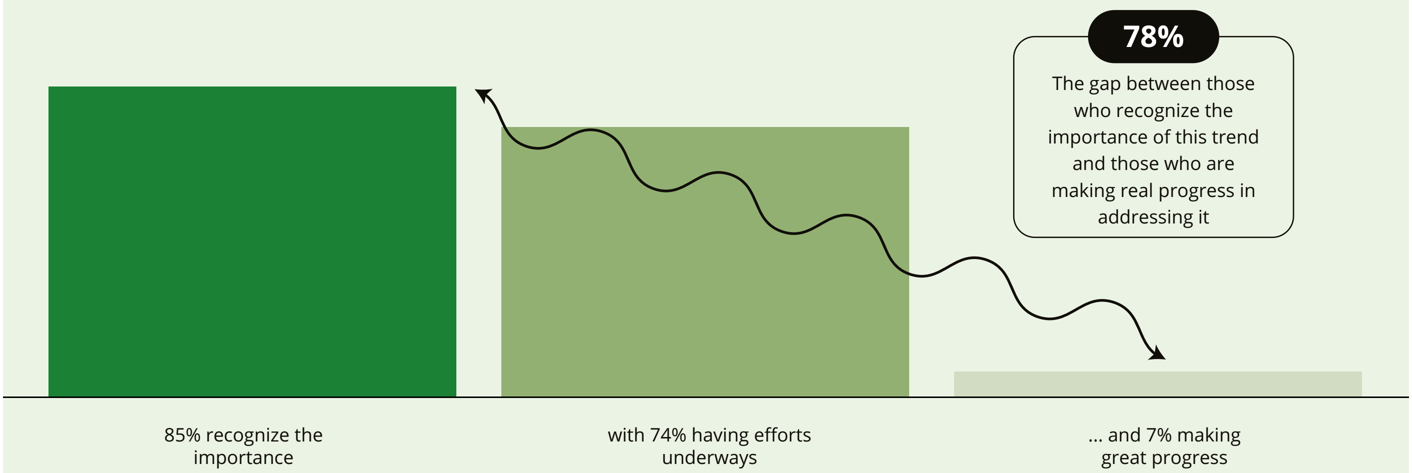
Technologies evolve faster. Customer expectations shift more rapidly. Entire industries are being reshaped by artificial intelligence, digital platforms, and new business models. Across the Middle East, ambitious national transformation agendas are accelerating the pace of change even further.

In this environment, relevance is no longer something organizations achieve.

It is something they must continuously earn.This challenge sits at the heart of Deloitte's 2026 Global Human Capital Trends research. Across industries, leaders are grappling with a common reality: the pace of change is beginning to outstrip the ability of organizations to adapt. Skills are becoming outdated more quickly. Business models are evolving more frequently. Workforce expectations continue to shift. The very capabilities that made organizations successful yesterday may not be the ones that sustain success tomorrow.[1]

Organization say it's important to orchestrate resources, but only 7% are making great progress toward doing so

Percentage of respondents answering the questions, "How important is increasing the ability of the organization and workforce to adapt at the speed required by today's world?" and "Where is your organization on its journey to address this issue?"



Source: Analysis of Deloitte's 2026 Global Human Capital Trends survey data.

For organizations across the GCC, the challenge is particularly acute. Governments and businesses are simultaneously navigating digital transformation, economic diversification, workforce nationalization agendas, and the rapid emergence of artificial intelligence. Vision 2030 initiatives in Saudi Arabia, the UAE's continued focus on innovation and competitiveness, and Qatar's national development ambitions are creating unprecedented opportunities for growth. Yet they are also raising the bar for organizational adaptability.[2,3]

The question facing leaders is no longer whether change is coming. The question is whether their organizations can keep pace with it.

Rethinking relevance

Traditionally, relevance was often associated with size, market position, or accumulated expertise. Organizations became successful by building deep institutional knowledge, refining established ways of working, and creating structures designed to deliver consistency and efficiency at scale.

Those strengths still matter. However, in an environment where change is constant, they are no longer enough. Increasingly, relevance depends on an organization's ability to learn, adapt, and evolve as conditions change. It is not simply about responding to disruption when it occurs. It is about building the capacity to adjust continuously—before disruption becomes a threat. This requires a different mindset.

Rather than viewing change as a series of discrete events that can be managed through periodic transformation programs, organizations need to recognize that adaptation itself has become a core organizational capability. In other words, the challenge is shifting from managing change to building readiness.

Organizations that remain relevant are not necessarily those that predict the future most accurately. They are the ones that can respond most effectively when the future unfolds differently than expected. Across the Middle East, leading organizations are beginning to recognize this shift.

While their approaches vary, three common themes are emerging. The first is embedding learning directly into the flow of work. The second is creating more fluid approaches to talent and capability deployment. The third is designing organizations that can adapt continuously rather than episodically. Together, these shifts provide a blueprint for building relevance in a world that will not sit still.

Building organizational relevance

If relevance is no longer something organizations achieve once, but something they must continuously earn, how do they do it?

Across the Middle East, leading organizations are beginning to converge around three strategic shifts. The first is embedding learning directly into the flow of work. The second is creating more fluid approaches to deploying talent and capability. The third is designing organizations that can adapt continuously rather than relying on periodic transformation efforts. Together, these shifts help organizations move beyond reacting to change and towards building readiness for whatever comes next.

Make learning part of the job

For many organizations, learning has traditionally existed alongside work rather than within it.

Employees attend training programs, complete certifications, or participate in development initiatives that sit outside their day-to-day responsibilities. While these approaches remain valuable, they were designed for a world where skills evolved relatively slowly and career paths were more predictable. That world is disappearing.

Today, the pace of technological advancement means that skills can become outdated within a matter of years—and in some cases, months. Organizations can no longer rely on periodic learning interventions to keep pace with changing business needs.[2] Learning must become part of how work happens.

This means creating environments where employees build new capabilities through projects, assignments, collaboration, and real-world problem solving. It means treating development not as an event, but as an ongoing process that is integrated into everyday work.

Across Saudi Arabia, initiatives such as the National Strategy for Data & AI (NSDAI) and Microsoft's commitment to help three million people acquire AI skills by 2030 reflect the growing recognition that workforce readiness depends on continuous capability-building rather than one-off training interventions.[5,6]

The lesson for organizations is clear: in a world of constant change, learning can no longer be something employees do between periods of work. It must become part of the work itself.

Move talent to opportunity faster

Historically, organizations have often responded to new priorities by hiring additional talent. When new capabilities were required, recruitment became the primary mechanism for acquiring them. Yet in today's environment, this approach is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain.

Skills shortages are growing. Competition for talent remains intense. And the capabilities organizations need are changing faster than external labor markets can often supply them.

As a result, many organizations are beginning to look inward before looking outward. Rather than asking where they can find new talent, they are asking how quickly they can redeploy the talent they already have. This requires a shift from workforce management to talent mobility.

Capabilities need to move more freely across teams, functions, and business units. Employees need greater visibility into emerging opportunities. Leaders need better mechanisms for identifying transferable skills and matching talent to evolving priorities.

This is especially important in the GCC, where AI adoption is accelerating and organizations are increasingly looking for ways to maximize the value of existing workforce capabilities. Research suggests that organizations across the region are becoming more focused on workforce agility and internal capability deployment as key enablers of future competitiveness.[2,3]

The organizations that remain relevant will increasingly be those that can move talent to opportunity faster than competitors can recruit it.

Design for continuous adaptation

The final shift is perhaps the most difficult—and the most important. Many organizations still treat transformation as a project. A major initiative is launched. Resources are mobilized. New processes are introduced. The organization changes. Then attention moves elsewhere until the next transformation program begins.

Increasingly, this model is proving insufficient. In a world where technology, customer expectations, regulation, and competition are evolving simultaneously, adaptation can no longer be episodic. It must become continuous. This requires organizations to rethink not just individual initiatives, but the operating models that sit beneath them.

Structures need to become more flexible. Decision-making needs to become faster. Resources need to move more easily across organizational boundaries. Leaders need to become comfortable adjusting direction as circumstances evolve.

The public sector offers an interesting example of this shift. Research from the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government found growing adoption of generative AI across Dubai Government entities, highlighting both the opportunities and organizational adjustments required as AI becomes embedded into day-to-day work.[4]

While technology may act as a catalyst, the broader lesson is organizational. The goal is no longer to create organizations that resist change. It is to create organizations that are designed to adapt to it.

Conclusion: From managing change to building readiness

Ultimately, the challenge of staying relevant is not a change management challenge—it is a readiness challenge. In a world where technologies evolve rapidly, skills have shorter shelf lives, and business models are constantly being reshaped, organizations can no longer rely on periodic transformation programs to remain competitive.

Across the Middle East, leading organizations are already beginning to make this shift. Whether through embedding learning into everyday work, creating more fluid talent models, or designing organizations that can adapt continuously, they are demonstrating that relevance is no longer something that can be achieved and maintained. It must be continually renewed.

Building lasting relevance requires organizations to:

- **Make learning part of the job:** Ensure capabilities are continuously developed through real work, not just formal training programs.
- **Move talent to opportunity faster:** Create systems that allow skills and expertise to flow quickly to emerging priorities and business needs.
- **Design for continuous adaptation:** Build structures, leadership approaches, and operating models that evolve alongside changing conditions rather than resisting them.

The organizations that thrive in the years ahead will not necessarily be those that predict change most accurately. They will be those that are most prepared to adapt when it arrives. And in a world that won't sit still, that may become the most important capability of all.

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

1. Deloitte (2026), Global Human Capital Trends Survey, https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/talent/human-capital-trends.html
2. Semantic Scholar (2025), Artificial Intelligence and the Gulf Cooperation Council workforce: adapting to the future of work, https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Artificial-Intelligence-and-the-Gulf-Cooperation-to-Albous-Stephens/5171acbae63b6367aba9488a5c17010648b67bba
3. GCC Board Directors Institute (2025), The state of AI in GCC countries: In pursuit of scale and value, https://gccbdi.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/The-state-of-AI-in-GCC-countries-In-pursuit-of-scale-and-value.pdf
4. Mohammad Bin Rashed School of Government (2025), Generative AI Adoption amongst Dubai Government Employees, https://mbrsg.ae/generative-ai-adoption-amongst-dubai-government-employees
5. SDAIA (2021), National Strategy for Data & AI, https://saudipedia.com/en/national-strategy-for-data-and-ai-nsdai
6. Microsoft (2026), Microsoft accelerates AI skilling in Saudi Arabia, helping 3 million people acquire AI skills by 2030, https://news.microsoft.com/source/emea/2026/02/microsoft-accelerates-ai-skilling-in-saudi-arabia-helping-3-million-people-acquire-ai-skills-by-2030/?msockid=19fe1dd9536160141fe108945231611a

Key Contacts

Samir Khayzaran
skhayzaran@deloitte.com

Samir is a partner at Deloitte Middle East where he leads the Organization and Workforce Transformation Service Offering. Samir has over 18 years of experience in consulting with global management consultancy companies in the areas of strategic planning, organization structure design, performance management, HR strategy and structure development, workforce planning, and driving large-scale transformation programs. Samir has worked extensively in the Public Sector, from education to non-profit organizations, as well as Financial Services, including commercial and development banks, and Telecom and Retail sectors in the Middle East, Europe, and Singapore.

Dania Nourallah
dnourallah@deloitte.com

Dania is a partner at Deloitte Middle East leading the Talent Management offering. With over 15 years of consulting experience, she specializes in organizational and workforce transformation, talent management solutions, HR strategy, and strategic change management. Dania has successfully led numerous large-scale transformation programs across both the public sector and prominent privately owned organizations in the region. Her expertise includes driving impactful change initiatives and optimizing talent strategies to achieve organizational excellence.

Deloitte.

Together makes progress

Designed by CoRe Creative Services RITM2546703