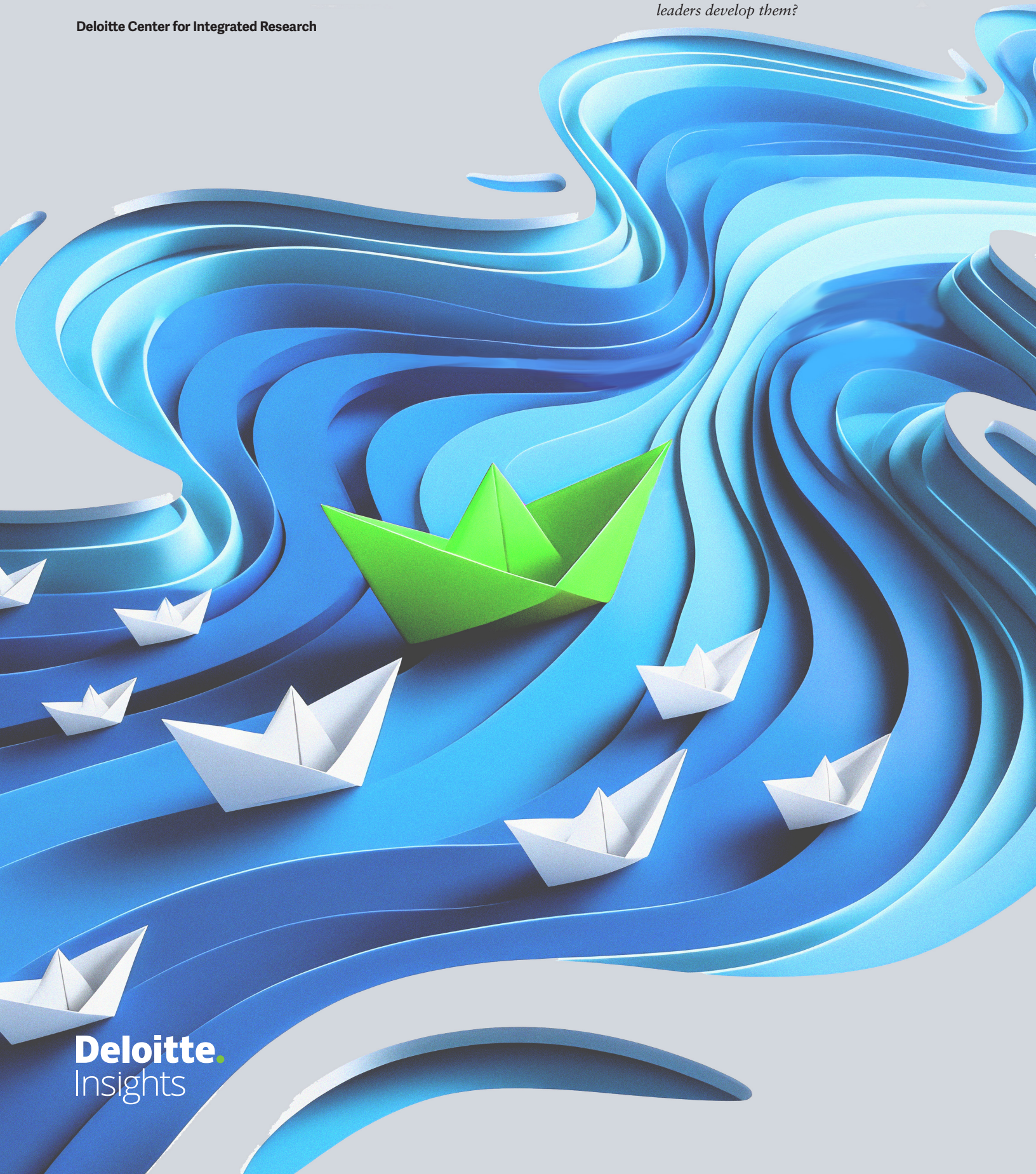


Reimagining CHRO roles and responsibilities for strategic growth

Deloitte Center for Integrated Research

The chief human resources officer role is changing. What new skills should be considered for the evolving CHRO job description, and how can organizations help leaders develop them?



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Insights

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Introduction

The market is signaling a rapid transformation for the chief human resources officer (CHRO) role, marked by an expanding scope of responsibility and, in turn, an elevated seat at the executive table.¹

A recent Deloitte analysis of the changing skills requirements across the C-Suite over the last five years found that the number of unique skills CHROs are expected to bring to the table increased by 23%. That's the highest of any of the executive roles analyzed—chief financial officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), chief information officer (CIO), chief strategy officer (CSO), chief revenue officer (CRO), and the CHRO.² At the same time, the analysis revealed that no skills requirements are being removed from their plates in a meaningful way.³ In essence, organizations are asking their CHROs to bring more and more to the table, without deprioritizing any legacy aspects of the role.

To better understand how the role is evolving, and how CHROs can leverage their expanded role, we analyzed publicly available job postings for CHRO roles across 20 industries in both the public and private sectors, and leveraged a skills and backgrounds taxonomy of over 32,000 different skills categorizations to identify which types of expertise were most sought after (see [methodology](#)).

We also conducted in-depth interviews with CHROs across industries to gain insight into how executives are putting these skills into action across a variety of business contexts and organizational challenges. The CHROs we interviewed emphasized that rather than reacting to challenges defensively, the CHRO should be “playing offense” and “own an agenda” that taps into human capital as a driver for organizational growth and value over time.





Evolution of the CHRO role and forces of change

“If you’re a profit and loss leader or you’re a CEO, what are you thinking about? You’re thinking about growth, you’re thinking about innovation, you’re thinking about the capabilities needed to deliver on the expectations of the shareholders—and a CHRO needs to think along those same lines.”

—Peter Fasolo, former CHRO for Johnson & Johnson

The growth in expected skills reflects an expanded mandate for the CHRO, whose role has evolved in sync with the nature of the work itself. In the last two decades, HR leadership has grown from managing employment and compliance to encompassing responsibilities related to technology, strategy, and business growth. External disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid adoption of artificial intelligence have emphasized the importance of people leadership in ensuring organizations can succeed in times of difficulty. “Leaders, chief executive officers, board members, and venture capital and private equity firms realized that HR was the secret glue holding everything together,” says the former CHRO of several high-growth technology companies about the impacts of the pandemic on the perception of HR leadership.⁴

As the importance of HR has grown, the individual sitting in the CHRO role is increasingly being expected to bring a more robust set of quantitative and analytical skills to the table, while also working to ensure that workers are engaged and treated well.⁵ In addition, they’ve continued to carry out their role as “a steward of culture,” says Christian Meisner, CHRO of GE Aerospace. He described how HR leaders are expected to “translate business imperatives into organizational culture” to ensure that human capital can be a key differentiator in driving business outcomes over time.⁶

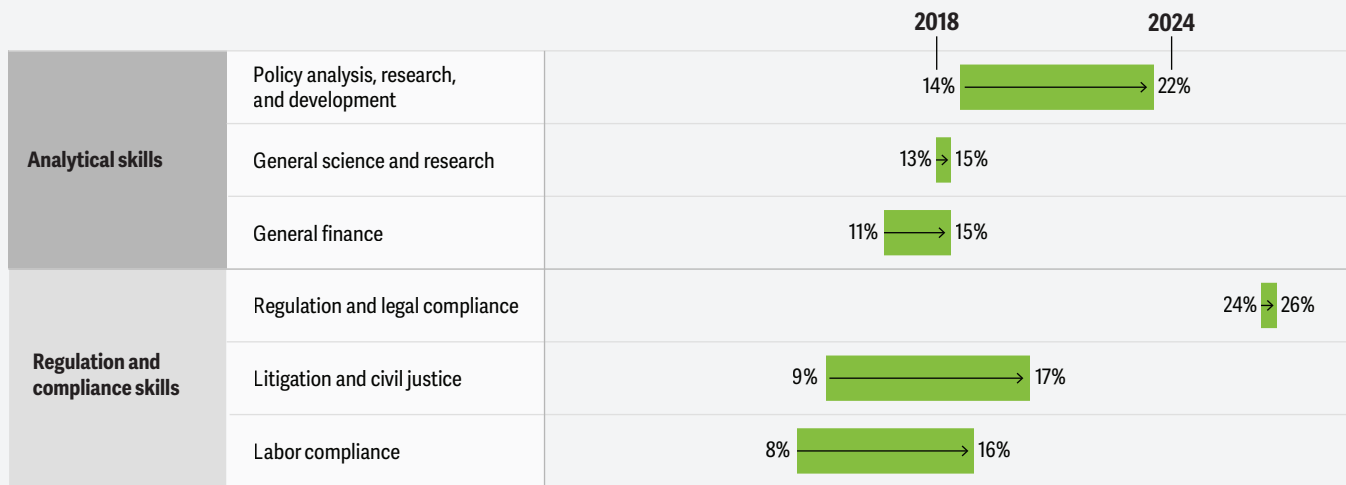
For many of the executives we interviewed, addressing the need for these new skill sets and knowledge starts with a strong understanding of—and integration with—the business. Peter Fasolo, the former CHRO for Johnson & Johnson, explains: “If you’re a profit and loss leader or you’re a CEO, what are you thinking about? You’re thinking about growth, you’re thinking about innovation, you’re thinking about the capabilities needed to deliver on the expectations of the shareholders—and a CHRO needs to think along those same lines.”⁷

Our job postings analysis confirms that these skills are top of mind, as organizations look for CHROs who can come to the table with skills related to business management (64% of job postings in 2024), business operations (54%), and business strategy (49%).⁸

Expanding the purview of the CHRO role without deprioritizing legacy tasks and bringing a more business-savvy perspective can feel overwhelming in terms of knowing where to start or where to focus talent efforts. However, the job postings analysis may provide insight into two rising areas of skill expansion where current and future CHROs may want to focus: analytical skills and regulation and compliance skills (figure 1).

Figure 1

Demand for analytical and regulation and compliance skills in the CHRO role is on the rise



Source: Deloitte analysis of Lightcast job postings data and Open Skills Taxonomy database.



Activating the analysis skill sets

From 2018 to the first half of 2024, demand in job postings for general finance backgrounds increased by 34%, general science and research skills increased by 15%, and most notably, policy analysis, research, and development skills increased by 60%.

Our executive interviews indicate that these emerging skills can help CHROs translate their initiatives into the language of the business. The CHRO for a large health care network emphasizes that HR leaders should be “much more data-driven, and able to come to the table with a business case for everything. They need to have a command of not only the facts and the trends but how to do the type of analysis that can support a credible business case.”

Fasolo, for example, leaned on a data science group within the HR department at Johnson & Johnson, whose primary mission was to predict what skills and capabilities would be necessary for current and future competitiveness. In one use case, the team deployed predictive analytics to proactively identify employee turnover. “Rather than looking backward through exit interviews, the data science team helped predict where turnover would likely come from within the global workforce,” Fasolo says. “For example, we knew that turnover in one country is higher among people who are less than two years into their tenure, have a compensation ratio that’s below 80%, have not taken recent training classes, and who have recently had a new manager assigned.”⁹ Insights like these can help with a more nuanced—and personalized—talent strategy that supports the core priorities of the business.



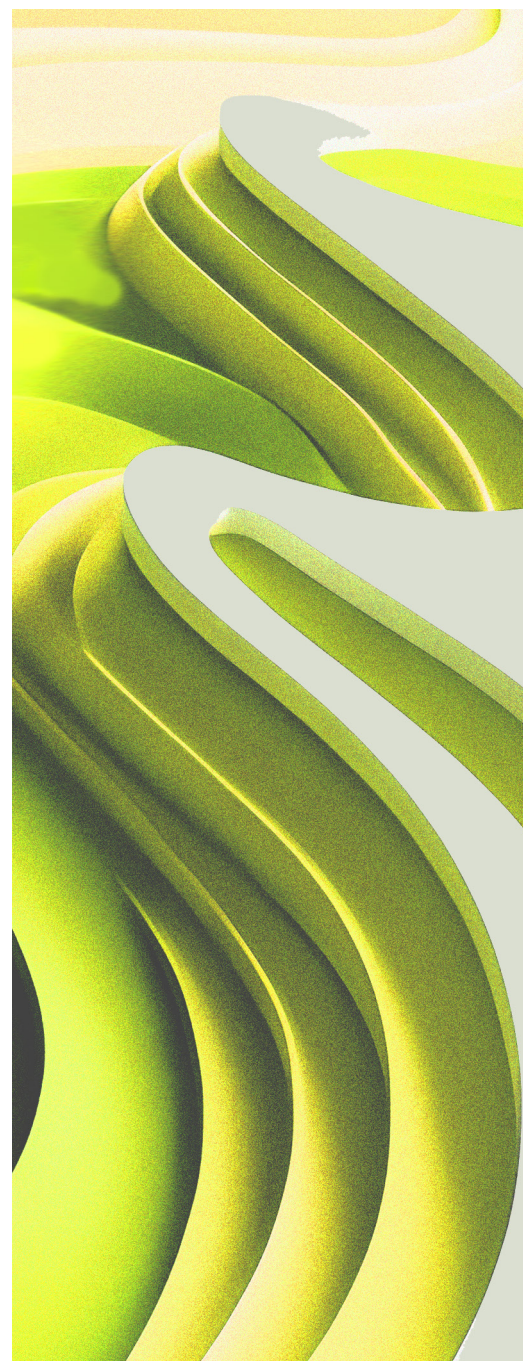
Fueling business growth with regulation and compliance

Similar to the trending need for analytical skills, there's also been a rise in demand for regulatory and compliance expertise between 2018 and 2024. For instance, our analysis shows that skills pertaining to labor compliance jumped over 90% in that time frame.

CHROs have historically been expected to confirm that their organization is compliant with labor and regulatory mandates, but the demand for a stronger business-talent integration is often changing how CHROs are expected to activate these ideas on behalf of the enterprise. "The old model of compliance policing has shifted from a singular linear function of supporting just people to being a business advocate," says the CHRO for a large global electronics company. "Now, I am more of a businessperson than I am an HR person."¹⁰ For some CHROs, this evolution of compliance as a "policing" function to a "business advocate" can mean ensuring CHROs are addressing these issues in a manner that helps businesses meet their strategic objectives versus inhibiting those objectives.

CHROs may now be expected to be able to bring recommendations to the executive team about how to navigate regulatory questions related to HR in ways that support business growth. The CHRO of

an energy company noted that the set of regulatory and business issues the role has to balance has become more complex and critical in shaping business outcomes "because things like cost of labor, employment law, and regulations will drive a headache for businesses if they're not really accounted for right at the start."¹¹





Building human capabilities to navigate change

Whether it is understanding global regulations or rethinking how analytics can bolster talent initiatives that support the business, the executives interviewed stressed that context matters. Specifically, they noted that business requirements are expected to inevitably impact how HR leaders will need to deploy different skills to drive business outcomes.

For instance, one chief people officer for a global toy manufacturer reflects on the difference between her current role and her previous role leading HR at a startup. “You pull different levers based upon the organization’s history or the trajectory of the company,” she says. “When you’re a startup, for instance, it’s less about regulations and more about bringing in great talent because you don’t want to stifle innovation. When the organization is more mature and you’ve got a well-oiled machine, you tend to focus on things that are sustainable” to continue to support scalable business growth.¹²

Regardless of organizational maturity, however, the chief people officer of a North American energy company highlights that business priorities should shape firmwide talent strategy as well as the operational strategy the HR function uses to deliver business value. “You are going to have to flex based

on the stage the company’s in,” they say. “As an example, we were going through a major transition from being a decentralized organization to a platform-centric technology organization, and the HR team had to lead a lot of that change. We needed a whole new set of talent. We needed a whole different culture. We had a lot of reorganization we needed to do.”¹³

These shifting dynamics reinforce that while a specific set of skills may grow in importance, how the organization needs talent to activate those skills will continue to evolve over time. Likely for this reason, the job postings in our analysis regularly listed more of what Deloitte calls “enduring human capabilities” as core requirements for their organization’s CHRO position: skills like initiative and leadership (74% of job postings in 2024), communication (59%), and critical thinking and problem solving (55%). In fact, in both Deloitte’s 2025 Human Capital Trends report and in a recent study on evolving C-suite roles, leaders frequently reinforce that as the world continues to change in unpredictable ways, having enduring human capabilities to navigate these changing landscapes will be important for success across the enterprise.¹⁴





The business-oriented talent leader

Our research suggests that the breadth of the CHRO role—as well as the breadth of needed skills and capabilities—is likely to continue to expand in the coming years. In light of this, CHROs should consider ways they can avoid getting stretched too thin by disparate responsibilities and requirements and focus instead on approaching the role with a strategic focus on serving business priorities. As Fasolo puts it, “the primary framing of the function and the CHRO role is to deliver value as the recipients see it, not as the function sees it.”

Because of the complexity of the questions that reach CHROs, they often have to manage the competing needs of multiple stakeholders when delivering value across the organization, including the needs of the workforce. Several CHROs we spoke with highlighted the initial shift to remote work during the pandemic as an example of a complex situation faced by CHROs in recent years. In this kind of situation, the CHRO of a US state government said that leaders might consider adopting a mindset that “I’m not here for management; I’m here for the organization” in order to help balance the different needs of stakeholders and focus on value creation over the long run.

To navigate these challenges, HR leaders can consider the following strategies to help balance competing needs and growing responsibilities in their roles.

Champion investing in people to strengthen business outcomes

It’s worth highlighting that the CHRO is traditionally the only executive whose focus is primarily on improving culture and the worker experience. Because of this, it is important for the CHRO to be able to highlight how business decisions might impact the workforce in less obvious ways. As the CHRO of a financial services company puts it, other executives may not “understand the cost of emotions,” for instance, and their downstream impacts on business outcomes.¹⁵

Deloitte’s Global Human Capital Trends research suggests that a strong organizational culture, sense of belonging, and focus on human sustainability—the degree to which the organization creates value for people as human beings—have been linked to improved business outcomes over time. Organizations that recognize the importance of human sustainability and have strategies to drive it are 1.4 times more likely to achieve desired business outcomes and 2.1 times more likely to achieve positive human outcomes.¹⁶

The unique blend of quantitative, business, and soft skills that the CHRO brings to the C-suite can enable them to connect these more human-centered variables with larger business outcomes. In addition to communicating the importance of an engaged and motivated workforce to the C-suite, the CHRO can also strengthen the organization as a whole by helping workers connect their own work to a larger purpose. As the CHRO of a global energy company says, “the people that work for us want to feel like they’re doing work that has meaning, that they can connect with, and that is important to them. So, you have to be really cognizant of what your company is, who it stands for, what it stands for, and how that shows up in its culture.”¹⁷

Scan the horizon for emerging capabilities and needs

The CHRO role is not the only role that has undergone rapid transformation in recent years. This trend reflects a broader business environment where work is constantly being reinvented at all levels of the organization and the demand for different skills is rapidly changing. For instance, the half-life of skills has shrunk dramatically. According to a *Harvard Business Review* report, the half-life of skills is now just five years on average, and in fast moving fields like IT, this can be as low as two and half years.¹⁸ Job postings requiring generative AI (gen AI) skills have quadrupled in the United States in the past year.¹⁹ This surge is expected to continue in 2025 given ongoing advancements in gen AI and

“For talent to be a multiplier for the organization, the workforce you have today needs to become the workforce you need tomorrow.”

—Pharmaceutical company
CHRO

the recent focus on agentic AI, which is expected as a progression in the AI development cycle.²⁰

These factors have already driven some organizations to move from more traditional, fixed models of workforce planning toward more dynamic and flexible approaches.²¹ Johnson & Johnson’s HR data science team discussed above is one example of a data-driven approach to workforce planning.

According to Meisner, this business-talent integration is at the forefront of his role at GE Aerospace. Meisner explains that with commercial air travel growing across the globe, GE Aerospace needed to expand the global footprint of its network for maintaining and repairing airplane engines. This meant working together with the business and strategy teams to build an operating plan to add talent in new markets—an activity that required numerous business considerations. The teams conducted individual market and talent assessments and developed training to help the growing workforce gain the required skills to deliver on increasing demand while maintaining a commitment to the highest safety standards.

CHROs can build on these efforts by working with other C-suite executives to map out how an organization’s long-term plans might create demands for new skills and begin building those capabilities among the workforce before they come into high demand. As the CHRO of a pharmaceutical company notes, “for talent to be a multiplier for the organization, the workforce you have today needs to become the workforce you need tomorrow.”²²

Build intellectual flexibility across the function

As noted above, the CHRO role has expanded dramatically as the nature of work has become more complex. Our analysis of skills data for CHROs reflects the added responsibilities and expectations placed on the CHRO in the recent past. Given that the expansion in skills has not slowed down, and that external challenges are likely to continue, our analysis suggests that the role of the CHRO may continue to grow in complexity in the years ahead. The CHROs we interviewed cited factors like AI, shifts in social trends, as well as changes in labor regulations as emerging questions that are expected to require adaptation to a changing world.

For the CHRO and broader HR function, it will likely be important to be able to flex those skills to address unexpected changes and larger-scale shifts as they arise. For instance, the impacts of gen AI and other technological advancements are already creating new kinds of strategic imperatives for the CHRO, such as implementing AI systems across the workforce. This implementation can benefit from the kind of quantitative and technical skills that have become table stakes for the CHRO in recent years.

At the same time, the CHRO will likely need to implement these technologies while also relying on soft skills to manage questions about how to motivate and engage the workforce around AI. A recent Deloitte survey of workers with five or fewer years of experience found that while 79% of surveyed respondents are excited about opportunities related to AI, nearly 30% of those same respondents say they are not being adequately trained to take advantage of these emerging technologies.²³ The CHRO of a consumer goods company describes the challenge as multifaceted for the organization: “How do you think about engaging with technology as an employee? And how do you build an infrastructure around it? It’s radically different from how we’ve thought about it in the past. The ethical implications are significant.”²⁴



Thriving through change

As organizations continue to face a wide range of external challenges and internal organizational transformations, bringing a flexible and expanding set of skills to the table may be foundational to enabling the business—and its people—to grow in the face of rapid change. By focusing on strategic initiatives and maintaining a balance between business acumen and people-centric leadership, CHROs can help their organizations thrive in an ever-changing landscape.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To gain insights into how organizations are recruiting for CHRO and other talent leadership roles, we analyzed data from 748 publicly available job postings across 20 industries in both the public and private sectors.

To benchmark what these roles looked like prior to the pandemic, we analyzed job postings from 2018 through the first half of 2024.

We leveraged Lightcast's Open Skills Taxonomy (over 32,000 different skills categorizations represented within the database) to analyze which types of expertise were most often pursued. For example, experience with managing budgets would be categorized as "budget management."

In addition, we augmented this analysis by conducting in-depth interviews with nine current and former CHROs across a variety of industries, to gain insight into how these executives are putting new CHRO skill sets to work to address business and organizational challenges.

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