seramountHR
The Strategic Change Partner

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Toward a New Skills Paradigm

Building Workforce Fluidity and Talent Agility in the AI Era

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Foreword

AI is proving itself to be more than a new technology. It is accelerating the pace of change and testing an organization's capacity to adapt, evolve, and transform.

Legacy systems were not built with the capacity to absorb change at the pace today's environment demands, causing slow adaptation as roles, workflows, and expectations evolve. As routine work is automated and roles are reconfigured, organizations are losing traditional pathways for skill development, experience building, and leadership growth. That's why AI adoption is widespread but its impact is uneven.

The organizations that succeed in today's business environment will be those that can build the capacity to adapt to continuous disruption. As a foundation of SeramountHR's **mission to support CHROs on the path from insight to enterprise action**, this new series of research installments addresses the challenges of transition and transformation capacity.

Steve Pemberton
Head of SeramountHR

The Adaptable Workforce Agenda

AI and the New Workforce Transition

As pressure for AI experimentation results increases, HR will either serve as an accelerant or a bottleneck on change. **Our analysis defines HR's role in setting the pace of corporate strategy in response to AI.**

Toward a New Skills Paradigm

As roles shift and the demand for new capabilities grows, legacy systems reduce employees' ability to create the most value. **Our examination into workforce fluidity identifies actionable steps to enable talent mobility as work evolves in the AI era.**

From Career Pyramid to Diamond

As career pathways shift and development models fall short, organizations face growing strain on managers' capability to translate strategy into action. **Our research pinpoints the leadership systems organizations must build for stronger strategic execution.**

Methodology

In addition to extensive secondary research spanning academic journals, labor market analyses, and industry publications, SeramountHR interviewed chief human resource officers, talent leaders, and executives managing large-scale workforce and operational changes. Taken together, this research provides evidence-based guidance for workforce transformation in the AI era.

Agility Is Essential in the AI Era

C-suites across the globe are pushing to implement AI into their business models, yet very few are finding a way through adoption to create real competitive advantage. While some early adopters are already using AI to change how they work, the winners of major technological change are the organizations that can combine new technological capabilities with real operating change.

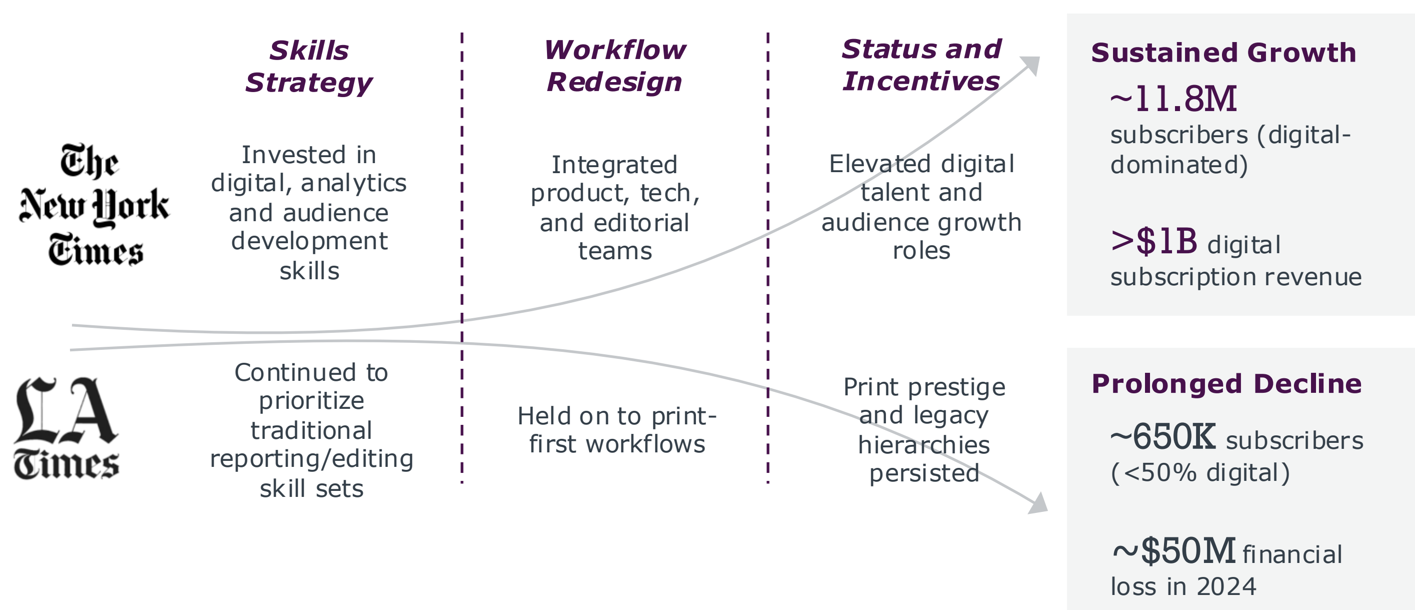
A perfect example from the last major digital transformation is the print newspaper industry.

How Talent Agility Won the Digital Publishing War

In 2014, both The New York Times (NYT) and its competitors like LA Times had adopted web-based publishing, but few had shifted their legacy talent systems to match their new technological reality. In a later leaked report, NYT admitted that despite adopting digital publishing, their newsroom culture, workflows, and skill base were still optimized for print.

Moving from adoption to transformation required the NYT to transition skills, incentives, and workflows toward new value engines, and it allowed them to secure the spot as a leader of digital journalism. Meanwhile, most other news organizations, including LA Times, allowed print-centric skill systems to become liabilities. Nearly a decade later, they are still facing the consequences as their print circulation has collapsed and the paper is still working through ongoing financial losses.

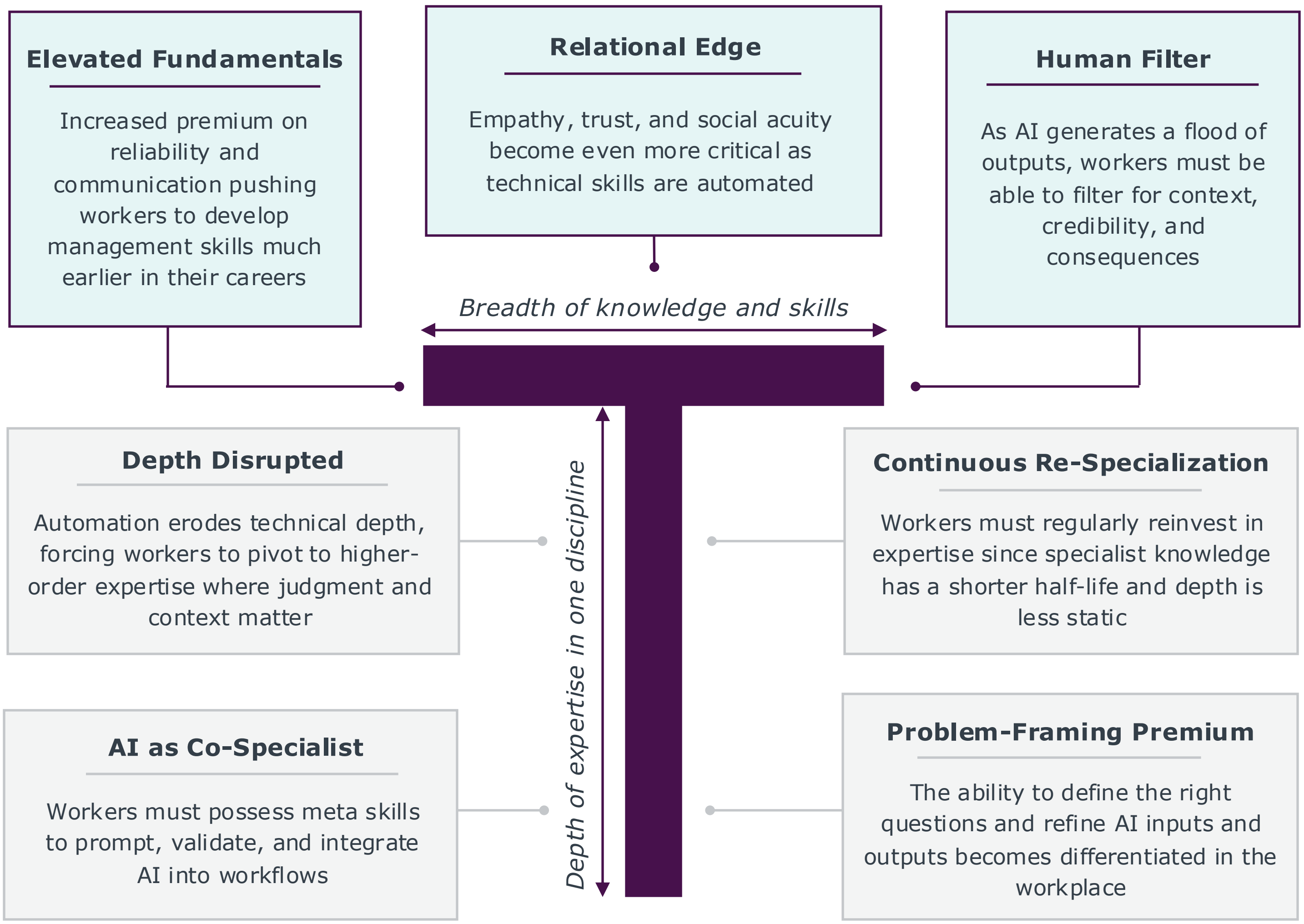
At its heart, the NYT's strategy illustrates how true digital transformation requires an equal investment in talent transformation. In the case of any technology, including AI, **organizations cannot create value simply by layering more technology onto existing ways of working**. For maximum impact, organizations must rethink how they prioritize skills and deploy talent to meet new technological demands.



The Speed of AI Changes the Human Capital Equation

On the road from AI adoption to transformation, companies across industries and sectors are beginning to see that the skills required for professional success are already changing.

AI Is Already Affecting the Skills We Need for Success



In response, CHROs are actively in the process of adjusting their talent acquisition, development, and retention strategies using this new definition of essential skills. However, as AI advances over the next 12-18 months, **these priorities might be completely different**.

That is what sets the AI era apart from any technological advancement of the past—the speed at which companies need to metabolize change. In this environment, disruption has become the norm, meaning that organizations must find new and more agile ways to ensure that their existing workforce can be adaptable to ever-changing priorities.

Not Quite the Skills Revolution We Hoped For

To achieve agility, the place most organizations start is redefining work around skills.

However, barring a few rare success stories, most companies find themselves stuck in the pilot stage of skills-based talent agility. After diving into the “skills revolution” and interviewing dozens of CHROs, our research indicates that skills models are still more mechanical than strategic.

A Skills-Based Maturity Model

Level 1

Reactive

Transactional, administrative, and compliance-driven; skills not systemically tracked

Level 2

Proactive

Emerging efforts to assess talent, identify skills needs of business units, map skills to work

Level 3

Strategic

Skills intelligence deployed for strategic workforce planning, upskilling, and internal mobility

Level 4

Systemic

AI and advanced analytics used to dynamically drive talent to highest-value work

Even in areas where it seems a skills-first approach is successfully adopted, progress is limited. For example, skills-based hiring—a near decade-long experiment—has yielded little to no change in real recruitment practices. Research from the Burning Glass Institute and Harvard Business School found that while there was a 4x increase in the number of roles where degree requirements were dropped from 2014 to 2023, there was only a 0.14% increase in hiring of candidates without degrees.

> “Recruiters still rely on the signals they’ve always used, because the alternative requires **time and systems most teams don’t have** … Credentials and degrees are still the fastest way to weed through a pile of 4,000 applications. The **process has to stay manageable**.”
>
> *-CHRO, Tech Company, 2,200 FTEs*

Skills Efforts Still More Mechanical than Strategic

While many organizations have invested heavily in skills-based talent strategies, most efforts remain focused on cataloging and tracking skills rather than redesigning how talent moves, develops, and creates value across the enterprise.

Skills-Based Mechanical Efforts Stalling

- Establishing an organization-wide skills library (38%)
- Mapping skills to jobs (55%)
- Mapping skills to individuals (40%)

Barriers to Skills-Based Transformation

- Legacy mindsets and practices (46%)
- Compensation practices restrict rewarding skills (32%)
- Difficulty keeping up with changing business needs (32%)

The dominant strategy to address gaps has been inventorying and evaluating skills. However, to truly deliver the capabilities organizations need in the AI era, existing systems around deploying and developing talent must be redesigned.

In our research, SeramountHR has identified **four key barriers organizations must remove to improve workforce agility** and unlock essential capabilities.

Visibility

Employees lack transparency into where skills are needed. HR teams can alleviate that by providing simple pathways to make opportunities more accessible.

Permission

Governance structures create friction points on employees' mobility throughout the organization. Organizations can better promote mobility by rewriting protocols and assigning dedicated ownership to reduce pressure on individuals.

Rationality

Employees navigate numerous professional risks and disincentives associated with mobility. To balance out the personal economics of internal movement, HR policies must reduce the personal and political risk of internal movement.

Capability

Skill development opportunities are often disconnected from employees' day-to-day. To achieve real value out of agility, organizations need to expedite learning cycles with decentralized development opportunities.

Visibility

Emerging Needs Are Moving Faster than We Can Move Talent

1

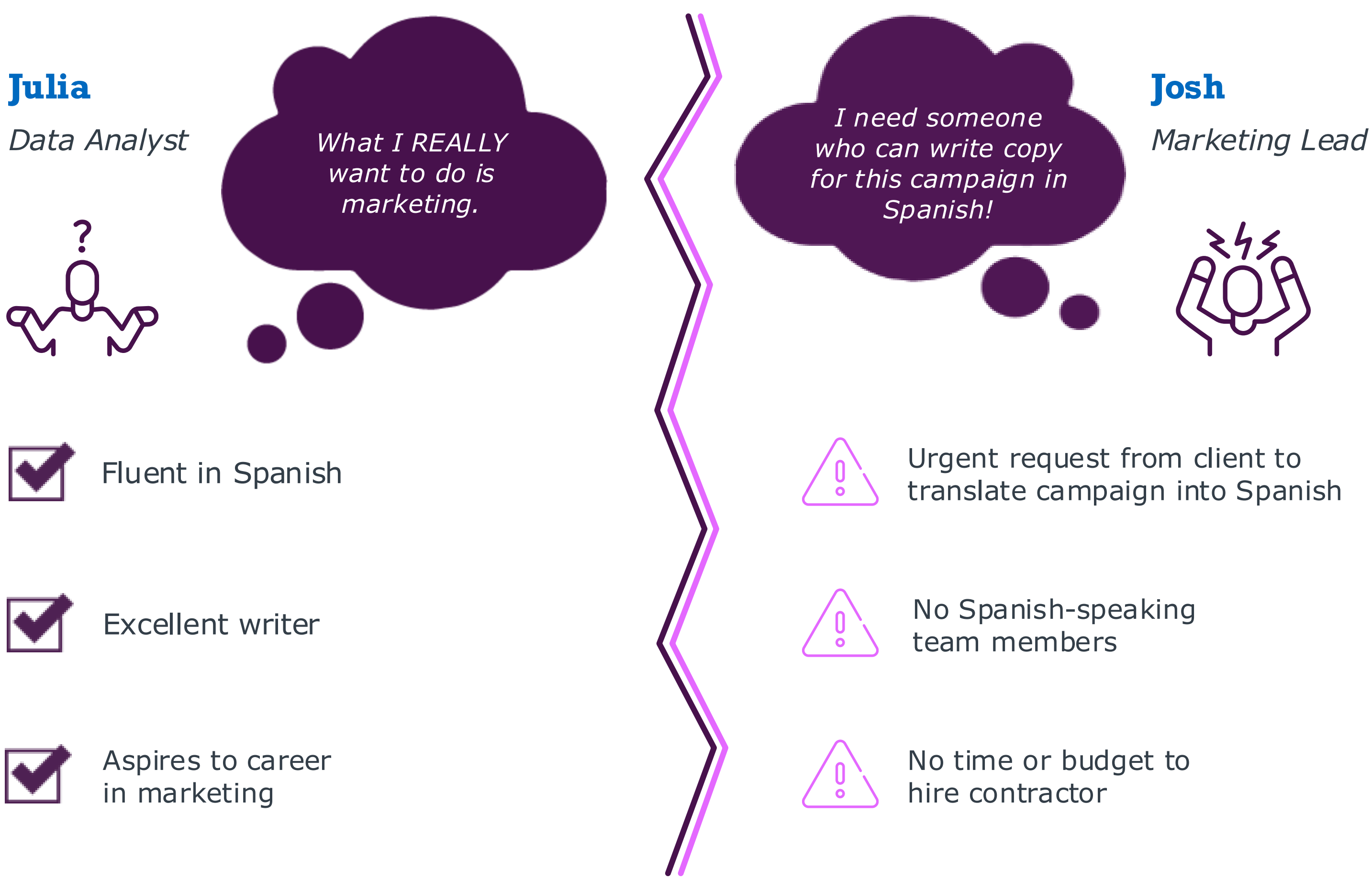
Overlooking Internal Capabilities to Meet Urgent Needs

Workforce agility stalls first when employees cannot see where their skills are needed most.

While employee visibility may sound like a straightforward communications issue, the challenge is more structural. In most organizations, opportunity tends to flow through manager awareness and informal networks rather than systems that make demand for skills accessible across the enterprise.

Historically, it was possible to tolerate some inefficiency in how opportunities surfaced internally for the sake of stability. However, as AI is rapidly shifting business needs, the absence of mechanisms to connect skills to live demand forces leaders to delay work, over-rely on external hiring, or make do with familiar employees rather than the full range of capabilities available across the enterprise.

Hidden Talents Become Lost Execution Capacity



Low-Cost Measures to Unlock Hidden Value

To counteract lost execution capacity, visibility must become a part of talent infrastructure: simple, trusted systems that actively connect skills to work, not just advertise roles and hope employees self-navigate.

One tactic that has helped organizations such as Workday and Mastercard achieve better visibility is an opportunity marketplace that allows employees to contribute their time to real business needs and identify growth opportunities.

Opportunity marketplaces help organizations convert hidden internal talent into usable capacity, filling urgent skills gaps without external hiring. They also tap into a broader employee appetite for gig-like, skill-building work. Particularly for younger workers who often use side gigs to explore interests and build new capabilities, internal opportunity marketplaces give organizations a way to channel that capacity back into the enterprise rather than losing it to the external gig economy.

"Talent Marketplace"

- Uses AI to match employee skills and interests to projects
- Over 5,000 gigs created in first 6 months
- Employees commit 15%–50% percent of their time for 3–6 months

Key Benefits

- Increased employee retention one year after completing gigs
- 67% increase in applications from internal candidates
- 83% of managers felt their team members brought back new skills

79% Increase in internal hiring

"Unlocked"

- Connects employees with projects, volunteering, learning, and open roles
- 3,000+ projects assigned
- 90% of workforce registered on the platform

Key Benefits

- 32K workdays saved in one year
- Diverse perspectives reduced risk on new product launches
- One third of participants changed roles or were promoted after completion

500K Additional hours of capacity added

It is important to note that organizations do not need a sophisticated platform to begin building this capability. In our research, we identified that even lighter lift processes such as shared spreadsheets, Slack or Teams channels, online forms, and weekly matching processes were enough to start changing behavior by making internal work easier to see and easier to pursue.

Permission

Legacy Talent Systems Are Holding Back Mobility

2

Why Rules and Structures Keep Talent Stagnant

Internal mobility breaks down when legacy rules make movement harder than staying put.

While expanding visibility can help make opportunities more achievable for employees and more responsive to living business needs, employees will likely remain in place if the organization's rules around talent mobility make movement difficult or dependent on managerial discretion.

It's not enough to help employees understand what internal roles are available if they don't feel empowered to actually move into them. Without clear permission, employees feel trapped—dedicating time and effort to positions they can't pursue.

In the example below, we see how visibility without mobility permissions can lead to avoidable attrition in roles employees currently hold and elongated vacancies in the roles they could fill.

Mobility Friction Becomes Retention and Vacancy Risk

Enrique, a top performer in HR, wants to **move to IT Services** after building a valuable reporting dashboard for his team

Enrique completes a six-week **gig project** for IT Services; he gains new coding skills and impresses the reporting manager

A **role opens up** in IT Services that aligns with Enrique's competencies, but he learns of it from an **external job board**

Enrique applies but is discouraged by the **required CS degree and two-year tenure**

Enrique's manager informs the hiring manager that he is "too essential" to HR and **vetoes the move**

Enrique **accepts an external offer** in IT; the company loses a high-potential employee, and the IT role remains vacant for four months

Avoidable Costs:

$71,000

Simple Shifts to Rewrite the Rules of Movement

To allow talent to move to areas where they can create more value, mobility systems need to reduce friction and barriers around internal movement. In our research, we've observed organizations doing this through various policies, including:

Monitask

Internal-first hiring expectations

Job openings are posted internally for a minimum number of days before being advertised externally, positioning internal mobility as the default hiring strategy

AARP, Schneider Electric, HSBC

No manager approvals or counter-offers

Internal movement does not require manager approval, and managers cannot intervene with counter-offers, reducing talent hoarding and enabling open movement

IBM, verizon

Waived degree requirements for internal candidates

Internal candidates are not subjected to the same degree requirements as external hires, expanding mobility based on demonstrated skills

amazon

Removal of time-based restraints on movement

Lowered tenure expectations for role shifts to 12 months, accelerating talent redeployment and demonstrating commitment to value over tenure

Taking this further, companies such as **Bank of America** and **SpaceX** utilize full-time staff members to help employees navigate systems, counsel hiring managers, and ensure internal talent is being considered with seriousness and speed. This support sets a clear precedent with employees and managers that mobility is an owned function of the enterprise with dedicated resources, not an informal aspiration.

BANK OF AMERICA

Talent Mobility Advisors

- Staffed on Talent Acquisition team
- Review resumes and provide guidance on roles based on employees' career interests, skills, and experience
- Provide prompt updates to employees on their application status and ensure that internal applicants receive feedback

Matching employees to internal opportunities and navigating internal career paths

SPACEX

Internal Mobility Specialists

- Work with recruiters and hiring managers to assess internal applicants against job requirements
- Evaluate internal candidates' skills and identify best-fit opportunities
- Create new processes to bridge gaps between recruiting and talent management

Rationality

Stopping Internal Movement Has Become a Defense Mechanism

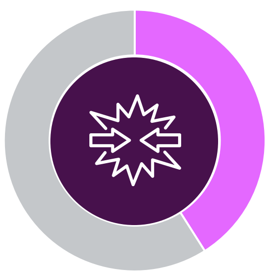
3

Mobility Is Too Risky for Employees and Their Managers

Internal mobility efforts often fail to move talent toward emerging value opportunities because employees see internal mobility as personally and professionally risky.

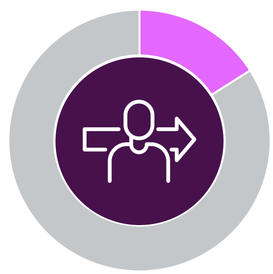
Even when employees have access to numerous opportunities and are encouraged to pursue them by enterprise policies, many often worry that taking on work outside their current role or pursuing a new position internally will damage their standing. The potential damage to their credibility with managers or teammates makes staying still—or leaving the organization altogether—more rational.

41%



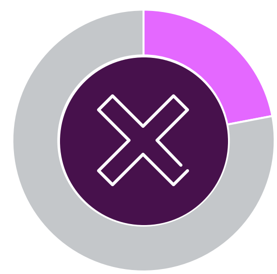
of employees fear negative repercussions for applying to internal positions

16%



of employees perceive applying to a different team will be seen as disloyal

22%



of employees believe lateral moves are not encouraged

Managerial Incentives Promote Talent Hoarding

Oftentimes, employees are not wrong in this assumption as their managers are incentivized to enforce these counterproductive and unwritten rules. **Seventy-seven percent of employers have lost talent due to lack of career development opportunities**, yet managers continue to ensure that the investment they make in high-performing employees is not wasted by having employees move away from their functions.

Managers are often rewarded on team performance and want to keep their teams as stable as possible. To achieve this, managers may understate the future potential of high-performing employees to reduce the likelihood of them being removed from teams. Research indicates that roughly **75 percent of managers have self-reported talent hoarding behavior**. While this is not often driven by ill-intent, the incentive for stability wins out.

Changing Incentives to Promote Mobility

To counteract the risk of mobility, employees need more than just formal policies around permission to feel confident in exploring potential contributions outside their role. Likewise, managers need better reward systems to support that movement.

One way to achieve better employee confidence is through **protected mobility windows—** dedicated time outside core role time employees can use to explore new skills and areas of interest. Giving employees control of this time ensures that internal movement does not have to feel like a choice between delivering in their role and exploring where else they can create value.

Google	3M	Atlassian
Allows employees to spend up to **20% of their work hours** on side projects they find personally meaningful or creatively challenging	Allows employees to spend **15% of their time** on projects they choose in support of business objectives	Teams can dedicate 20% of their time, either as one day a week or as a full "Innovation Week" every five weeks, to dive deeper into projects
✔ Work is sanctioned and time-boxed	✔ Participation does not compete with core work responsibilities	✔ Projects focus on generating value in response to new needs

Another way to reduce the perceived risk of internal mobility is to evaluate employees based on impact. In most organizations, performance reviews disincentivize employees to find new opportunities because there is little to no reward for contributions outside of the strict, role-specific executions.

If reviews and subsequent rewards are more closely aligned to enterprise contribution rather than narrow role execution, then employees are more motivated to step into emerging work or cross-functional contribution. Likewise, if a manager's performance assessment is tied to their team's impact outside of their specific function, there is less friction around supporting employees seeking emerging opportunities.

Meta and **Netflix** have implemented similar programs to rebalance internal mobility risk.

Meta

2026 – Revamped Performance Evaluation

Streamlined four-tier rating system with compensation tied to level of impact, not just role execution. There is a 200% compensation multiplier for those delivering "outsized impact" and up to 300% for "truly exceptional impact."

NETFLIX

2025 – Replaced Annual Performance Reviews

Compensation based on work impact and contributions to Netflix's strategic objectives, not seniority, experience, or individual performance ratings.

Capability

Traditional Skilling Models Are Not Suited for the AI Era

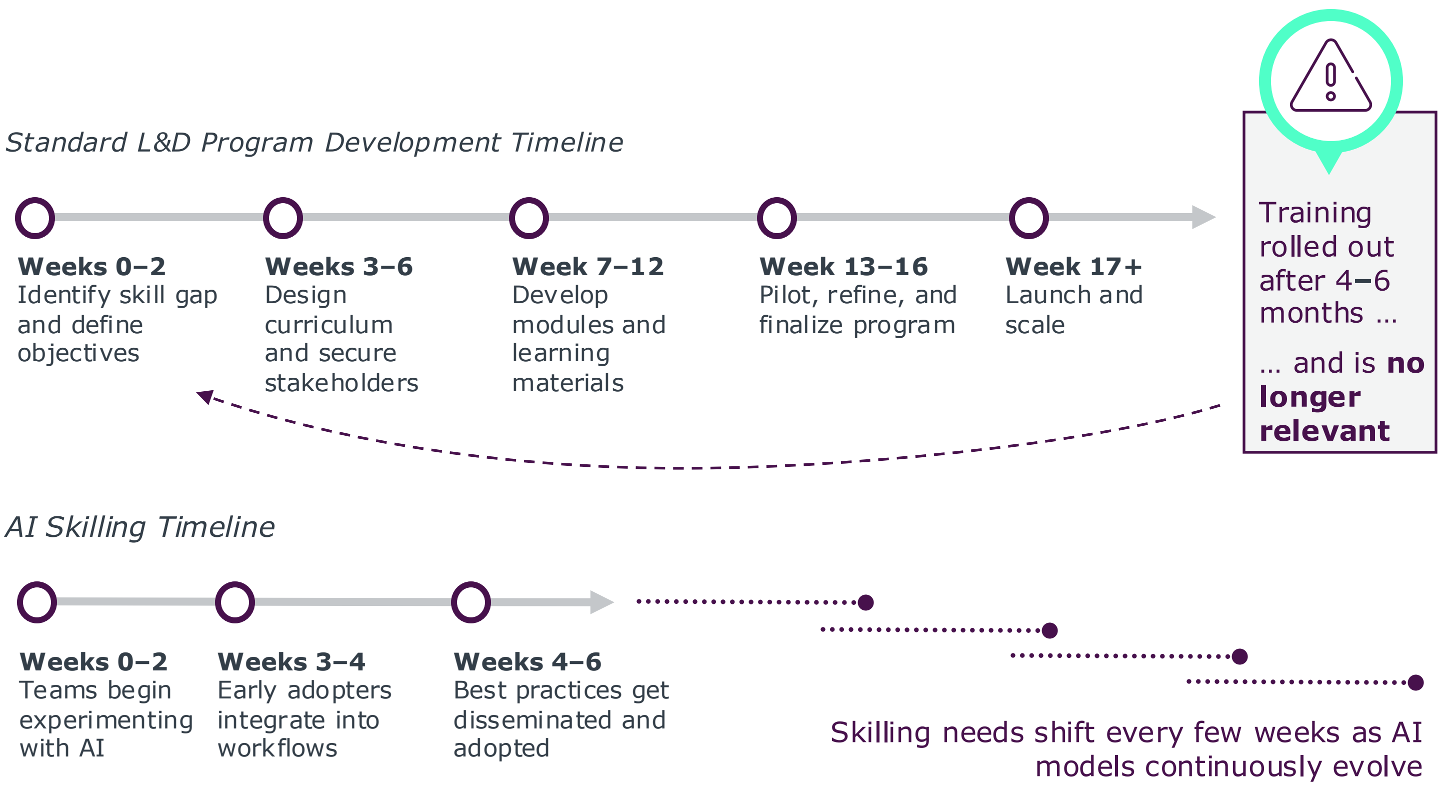
4

Agility Fails When Change Outpaces Upskilling

Employees may feel safe and interested in making an internal move, and the organization may support their mobility, but employees need a credible path to build the skills required for future work. This is where many organizations instinctively turn to centralized learning and development; however, our research indicates that this is where legacy systems are increasingly outpaced by the speed of change.

Traditional professional development operates on long cycles: Identify a skill gap, design the curriculum, develop the materials, pilot the offering, and then launch it broadly. While that cadence once made sense because skill needs were relatively stable, AI has broken that assumption.

New Skill Needs Are Developing Faster than Training Timelines



The real challenge in moving beyond traditional upskilling is redefining where learning happens and how it spreads across the organization. Practically, that means moving toward a learning and development strategy in which managers, early adopters, and peers help turn emerging skills into everyday work. In that kind of system, workforce agility depends less on cataloging skills comprehensively and more on building and deploying new capability fast enough to keep pace with changing business demands.

Moving Learning Out of Programs and Into Real Work

At the speed at which AI is evolving, centralized functions cannot be the only teachers. Peer-to-peer learning is faster, more contextual, and often more credible than formal top-down training. By encouraging employees to learn from colleagues facing similar work context, organizations can spread new skills much faster than a centralized team can manage on its own.

> "It's very unlikely that you'll ever learn faster, or better, than you will from one of your **fellow employees**."
>
> *Senior Executive, Google*

A complementary tactic from **Hearst** is making upskilling a focus of manager-led professional development. Initially, Hearst approached AI upskilling as an enterprise-wide, learning and development-led initiative. However, they found that this broad approach led to uneven adoption as employees couldn't see how AI was relevant to their day-to-day work. In response, they moved ownership closer to work with managers serving as key drivers of adoption. The results were significant, with much higher training completion rates and a significant increase in actual usage.

Development programs like these are particularly essential now as AI has reduced the traditional low-stakes learning experiences that employees used to have in abundance. In a business environment in which employees are expected to push through expertise gaps with AI augmentation, it's essential that employees have the training they need to make that goal a reality.

Shifting from an Enterprise Approach to Manager-Led Upskilling

A Challenging Start

- In January 2024, CEO announced enterprise-wide AI upskilling initiatives
- L&D had 7 months to train 7,000 employees
- Centralized rollout led to uneven adoption and resistance

Shift to a Local Approach

1. **Tailored Training Content to Functional Needs**
2. **Assigned Business-Level Sponsors**
3. **Reframed AI as a Core Skill, Not a Threat**

Scaled Adoption

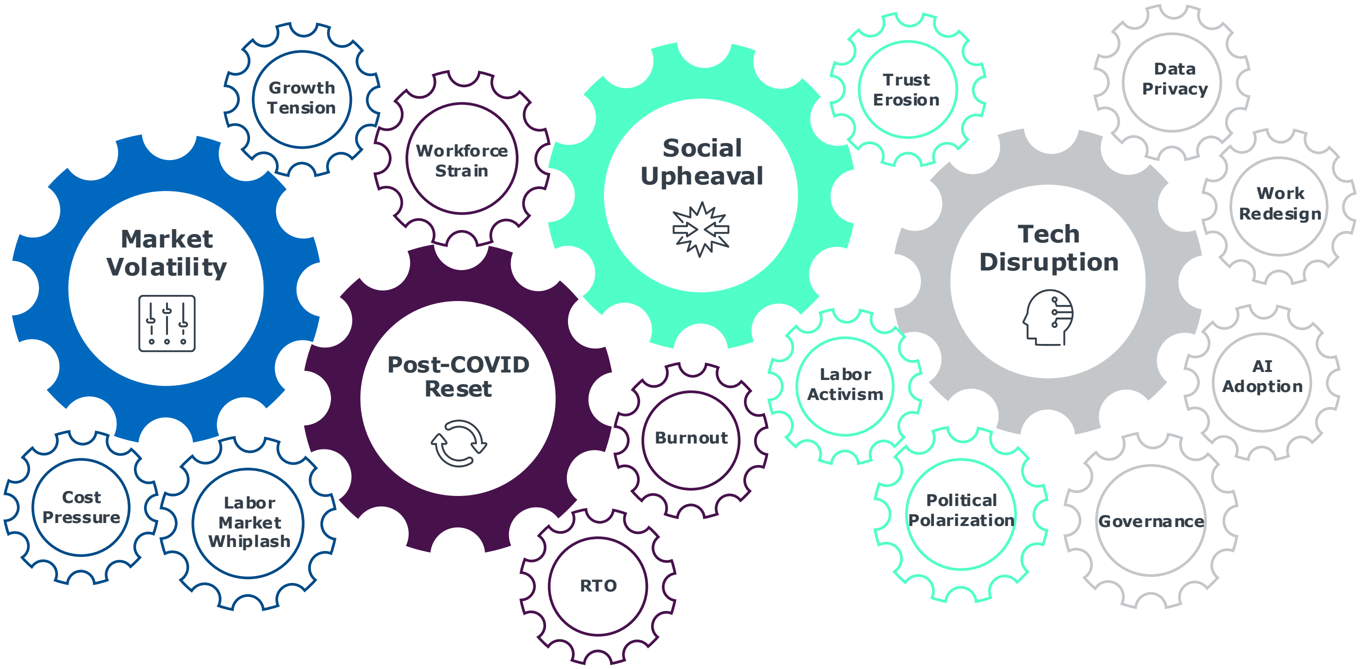
- **70%** of target employees completed training
- **174%** Increase in GenAI use
- **84%** Increase in visits to internal GenAI website

How SeramountHR Can Help

5

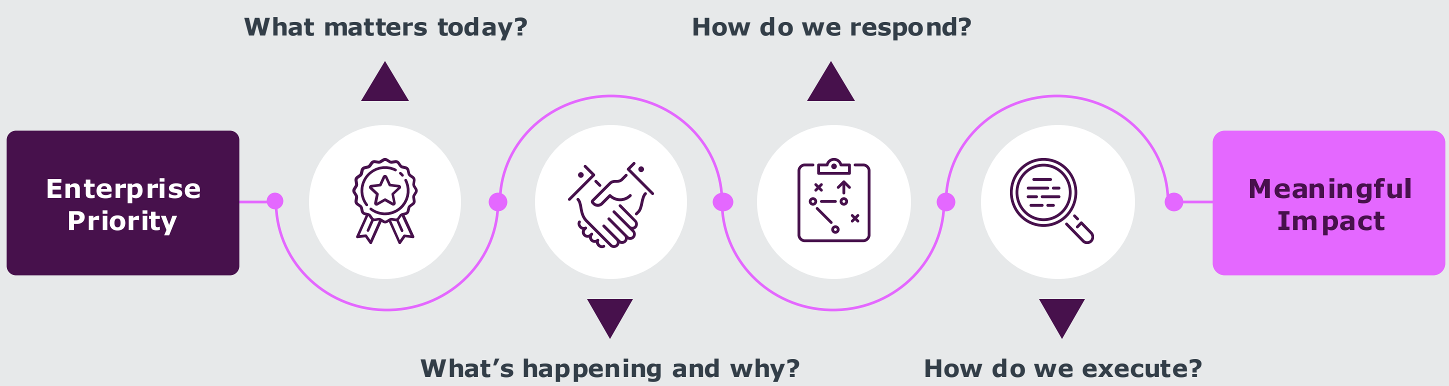
Priorities Are Changing Faster than Workforces Can Adapt

AI's impact on the value of work is just one of a hundred different disruptions workforce strategy is facing today. While these forces are not new, they are converging and compounding at a rate that most organizations were not prepared for. In this shift CHROs sit at the center of repeatedly reinventing the workforce without slowing the business or exhausting their teams.



SeramountHR Is Your Strategic Change Partner

Success in this era depends on the ability to adapt talent operating systems to continuous change. Our partnerships help CHROs and their teams navigate change and the roadblocks that stall progress.



A Managed System of Action for CHROs and Their Teams

Our CHRO partnerships are powered by a system of action that helps HR teams anticipate what's next, align around what matters, and activate work that drives impact.

Signals

What matters today?

- Curated strategic intelligence
- Primers on emerging trends and implications for institutional priorities

AgilityIQ

What's happening and why?

- Proprietary assessments, diagnostics, and tools
- Gap identification and prioritized action steps

Activation

How do we execute?

- Accountable action plans and execution support
- Priority cross-walk into operating models and leadership habits

Studios

How do we respond?

- Expert-facilitated workshops
- Stakeholder alignment to accelerate change adoption

Experiences

Immersive community gatherings for CHROS and HRLTs, where Signals are generated and refreshed

How the System Works

Your Director of Partner Success will guide your partnership, providing the **action** and **accountability** you need to navigate continual and compounding change.

Enterprise Priorities
Define the outcome, workforce implications, and constraints

Partner Action Plan
Sequence actions, owners, and evidence of progress

Managed System of Action
Mobilize the right Signals, AgilityIQ, Experiences, Studios, and Activation support

Measurable Progress
Document results and reset priorities as conditions change

Proactive Partner Success keeps the action plan moving and resets priorities as conditions change

Regular progress reviews keep the work accountable and aligned to enterprise outcomes

Defined artifacts make progress visible and auditable

Explore how SeramountHR helps CHROs and their leadership teams navigate continual and compounding change.

seramount.com/contact-us

Build the Workforce Fluidity AI Disruption Demands

As AI compresses the timeline for talent transformation, skills libraries and isolated reskilling efforts will not move talent toward emerging sources of value fast enough. CHROs need focused changes that make opportunities visible, remove the rules and incentives that keep people in place, and build new capabilities through real work.

The SeramountHR managed system of action can help you achieve measurable progress on opportunity visibility, mobility governance and incentives, and distributed upskilling.

Signals: *Connect Changing Skill Demand to Talent Strategy*

Use research and practitioner perspectives to identify how AI is reshaping work and the capabilities that create value in your organization.

AgilityIQ: *Find the Barriers Keeping Talent Stuck*

Identify the governance barriers, misaligned incentives, and learning bottlenecks that block talent from building the capabilities they need and pursuing higher-value work.

Studios: *Align Leaders Around the Talent Agility Imperative*

Bring the CHRO, HR leadership team, and business stakeholders together to decide where talent must move, which mobility rules should change, and how development can shift closer to work.

Activation: *Move from Skills Inventories to Operating Change*

Sequence the changes needed to connect employees to emerging needs with updated rules and clear measures of how talent is moving toward higher-value work.

SeramountHR Partners

Contact your **Director of Partner Success** to shape a service plan around developing and deploying talent around centers of value.

Not yet a partner?

Schedule time to speak to an expert.

Sources

5

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