



# The Future of Work and Learning:

The Impact of GenAI on Entry-Level Work

**D2L**

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# Introduction

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The prevailing narrative surrounding Generative AI's (GenAI) impact on the workforce often leans toward a “job apocalypse,” suggesting that many roles are being deleted wholesale from organizational charts, chief among them are entry-level roles (Partridge, 2025).

Data from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (2026) shows unemployment rising amongst recent college graduates. Reports from universities and recent grads describe the conditions of the labor market as a grind (DePillis, 2026). Other recent research questions the viability of entry-level work due to the increasing use of GenAI tools. Namely an imminent overcapacity in entry-level workers (Gigant & Sergent, 2025) and a coming “16% relative employment decline” for early-career workers in AI-exposed fields (Brynjolfsson et al., 2025).

D2L's newly commissioned survey of human resources decision makers reveals a reality that is more nuanced but just as concerning for the long-term health of the workforce.

**In January 2026**, D2L commissioned Morning Consult to survey 546 U.S.-based human resources (HR) leaders (Director level and above) with decision-making authority in human resources, talent acquisition, learning and development, or performance management to understand how Generative AI is shaping hiring decisions

Entry-level hiring volume is not yet in a rapid deceleration; rather, the roles are being redefined in ways that will hollow out entry-level work and the talent pipeline necessary for developing experienced professionals.

In the short term, the D2L survey showed a sense of optimism for entry level hiring—64% of HR leaders project that their entry-level hiring could actually increase over the next 24 months.

That optimism, however, masks a shift in the nature of the work: 48% of HR leaders now expect higher productivity from these roles due to AI, and 30% are shifting traditional entry-level tasks to mid-level employees who will be expected to “manage the machine” to do the legwork previously assigned to entry-level employees.

As a result, the danger of GenAI isn’t the immediate disappearance of the entry-level worker, but the gradual erosion of the initial professional experience that has effectively served as a defacto apprenticeship in building experience and expertise. By automating the “drudge work”—like research, basic data analysis and first-draft synthesis—organizations are inadvertently removing both the content and task engagement, and the cognitive struggle required to build deep subject matter expertise.

This creates a talent pipeline paradox. While 80% of HR leaders in our research currently feel confident in their ability to develop future leaders, 58% of those leaders who are expecting their upcoming entry-level hiring to decrease due to AI believe this will create a shortage of qualified senior leaders within just five years. This suggests that we are optimizing for short-term productivity at the expense of long-term institutional leadership capacity, including limited depth of foundational knowledge. “Cracks” in the foundation are appearing in the form of worsening soft skills—such as critical thinking and interpersonal communication—shortfalls that HR leaders already identify as the most difficult to fill, along with the gap in subject matter expertise.

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## NOTE ON RESEARCH TIMING AND GLOBAL VOLATILITY

These findings should be read in the context of early 2026 volatility. The survey was fielded in January 2026 and since then, two external shifts may accelerate the trends in this report:



**Macroeconomic shifts:** Increasing global uncertainty has placed additional pressure on economic prospects. This volatility could broadly affect hiring trends, with entry-level positions especially vulnerable to changes that were not fully anticipated earlier in the year.



**Technological acceleration:** The data predates the broad release of more agentic AI tools (Anthropic Claude Code and Cowork, OpenAI Codex, and the open-source Open Claw) that can autonomously execute complex, white-collar job workflows.

In short, the talent pipeline paradox and entry-level job hollowing were already visible in January, but these developments may speed the shift from execution to audit beyond what respondents anticipated. If early 2026 already felt like a grind for new workers, more capable tools that further automate cognitive struggle make strategic intervention even more urgent.

# The Current State of Hiring

According to survey respondents, the labor market for early-career talent is expanding, albeit with early but serious signals of distress. When asked about their 24-month outlook, 64% of HR leaders in our survey project an increase in entry-level hiring, with 15% expecting a “significant” increase [Fig. 1]. This suggests that, for the majority of organizations, the demand for fresh talent remains robust.

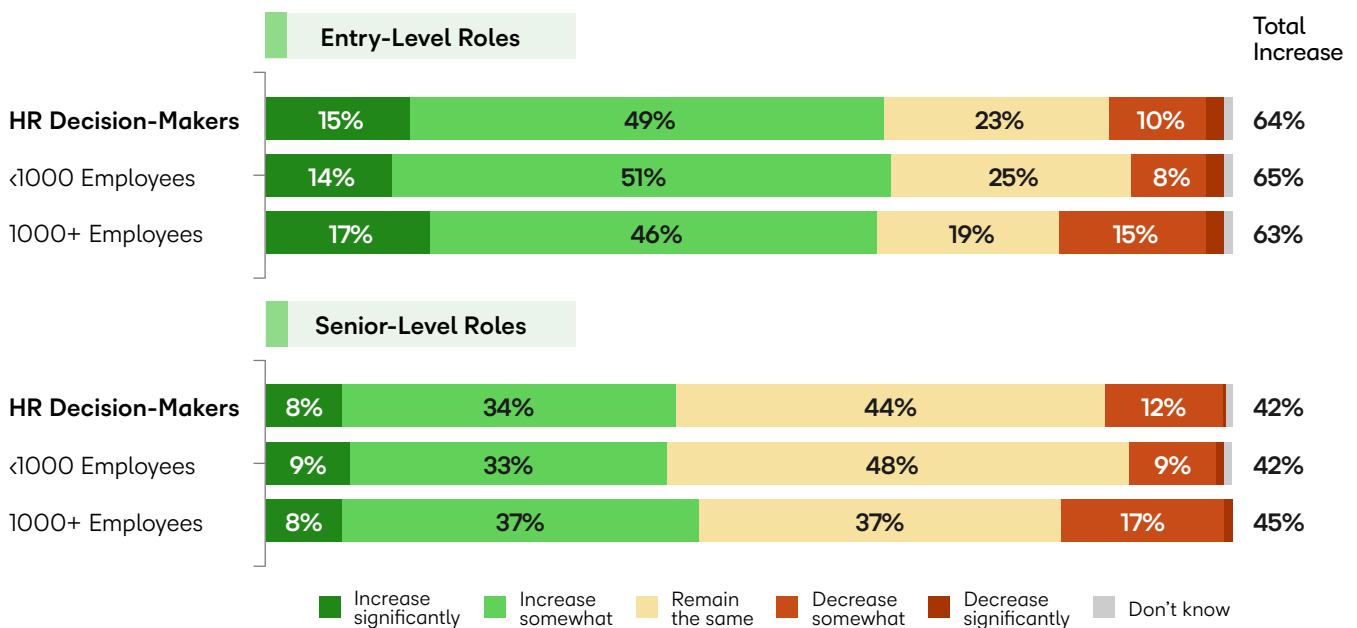
However, a closer look reveals that where hiring is cooling, **AI is almost always the catalyst.**



**FIGURE 1**

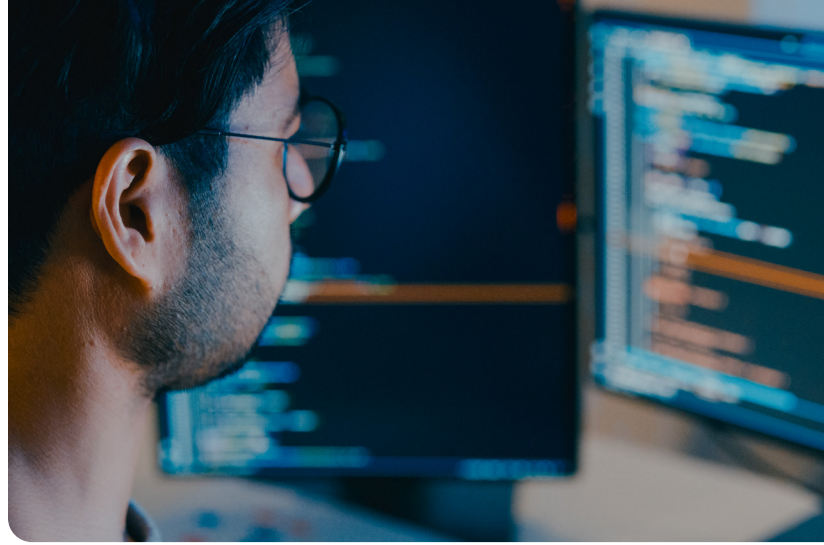
**HR leaders project greater hiring increases for entry-level roles than for senior-level roles—a trend that is consistent across company size.**

*Over the next 24 months, how do you project your hiring volume will change for entry-level roles (0–2 years of experience)/Senior/Specialist roles (8+ years of experience)? Will your hiring volume decrease, increase or remain the same?*



## The AI Displacement Factor

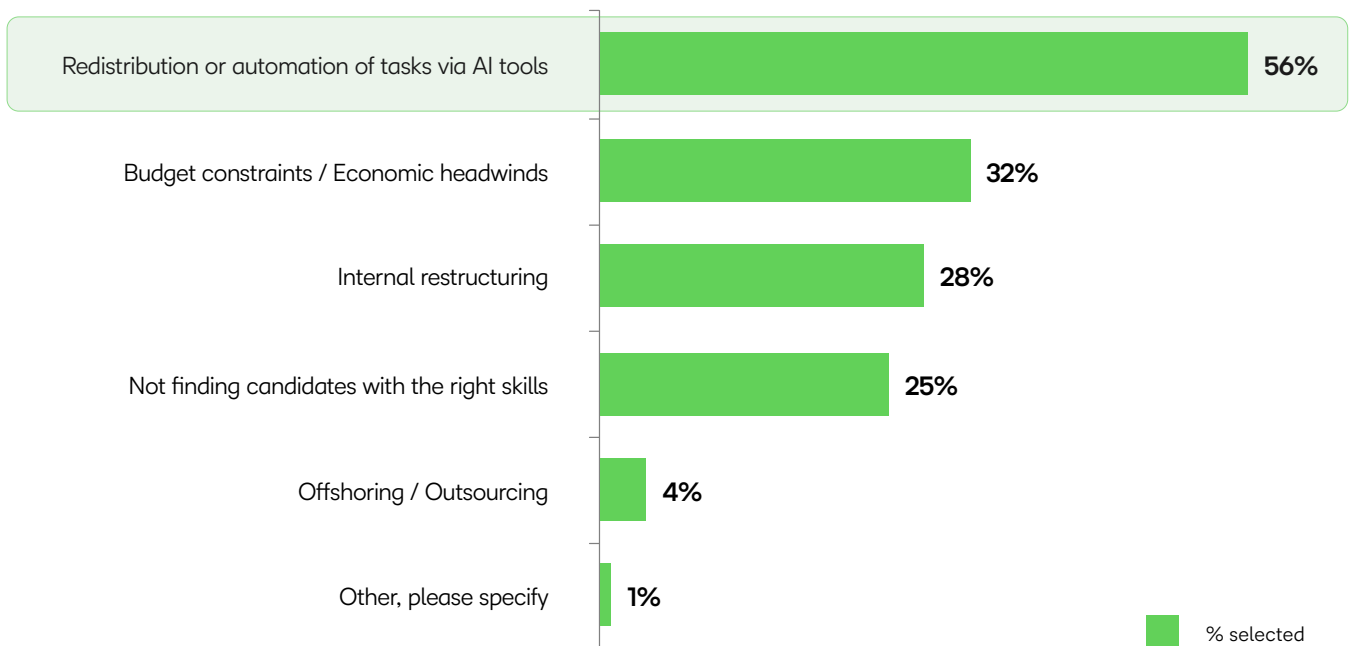
While only a minority of organizations (12%) anticipate a decrease in entry-level hiring, the drivers behind those decisions are telling. Among this group, 56% cite the “redistribution or automation of tasks via AI tools” as a primary reason for reducing headcount [Fig. 2]. This significantly outpaces traditional drivers such as budget constraints (32%) or internal restructuring (28%).



**FIGURE 2**

**Automation of tasks via AI tools is the main reason HR leaders cite decreased entry-level hiring projections in the next 24 months.**

*What are the main drivers for reducing your entry-level headcount? You may select up to two responses.*





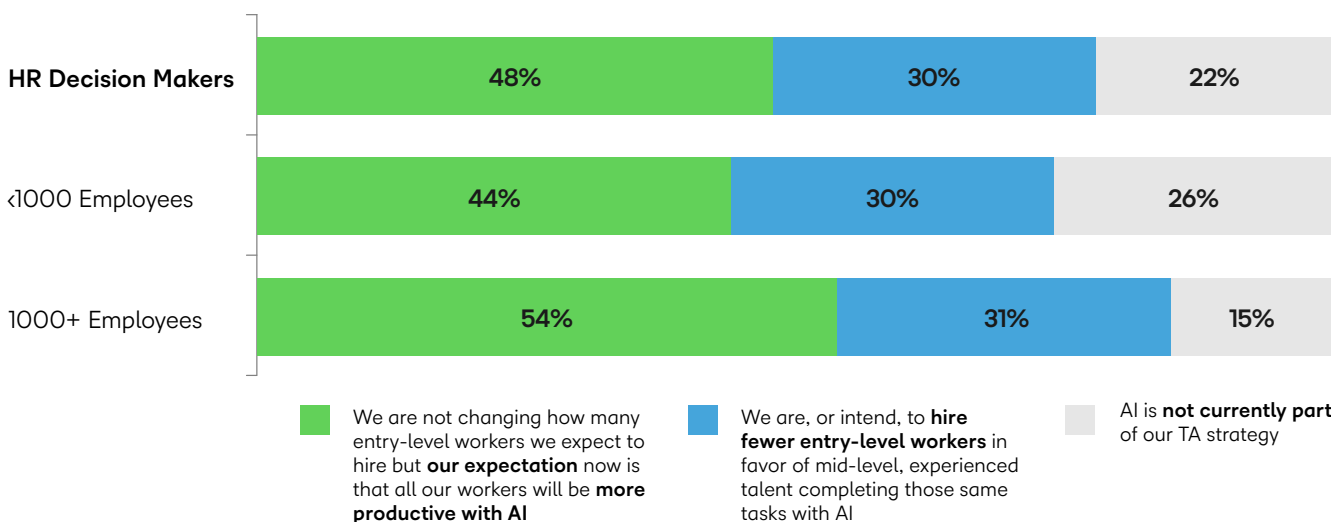
These numbers suggest that AI is not just another economic headwind; it is a fundamental shift in how roles are designed. Gigant and Sergent (2025) of the World Economic Forum found that half of global leaders already report 10–20% overcapacity in legacy roles due to automation. In our primary data, we see this

manifesting as a strategic choice: While just 12% of HR leaders reported actively decreasing their entry-level hiring, 30% reported their company’s talent acquisition strategy is shifting towards fewer entry-level roles with the explicit expectation that mid-level employees will use AI to absorb those tasks [Fig. 3].

**FIGURE 3**

**AI is actively reshaping talent acquisition strategies for four-in-five HR leaders, whether through productivity expectations for entry-level hires (48%) or expecting mid-level roles to accomplish entry-level tasks with AI (30%).**

*Which statement best describes how artificial intelligence (AI) is impacting your current talent acquisition (TA) strategy?*



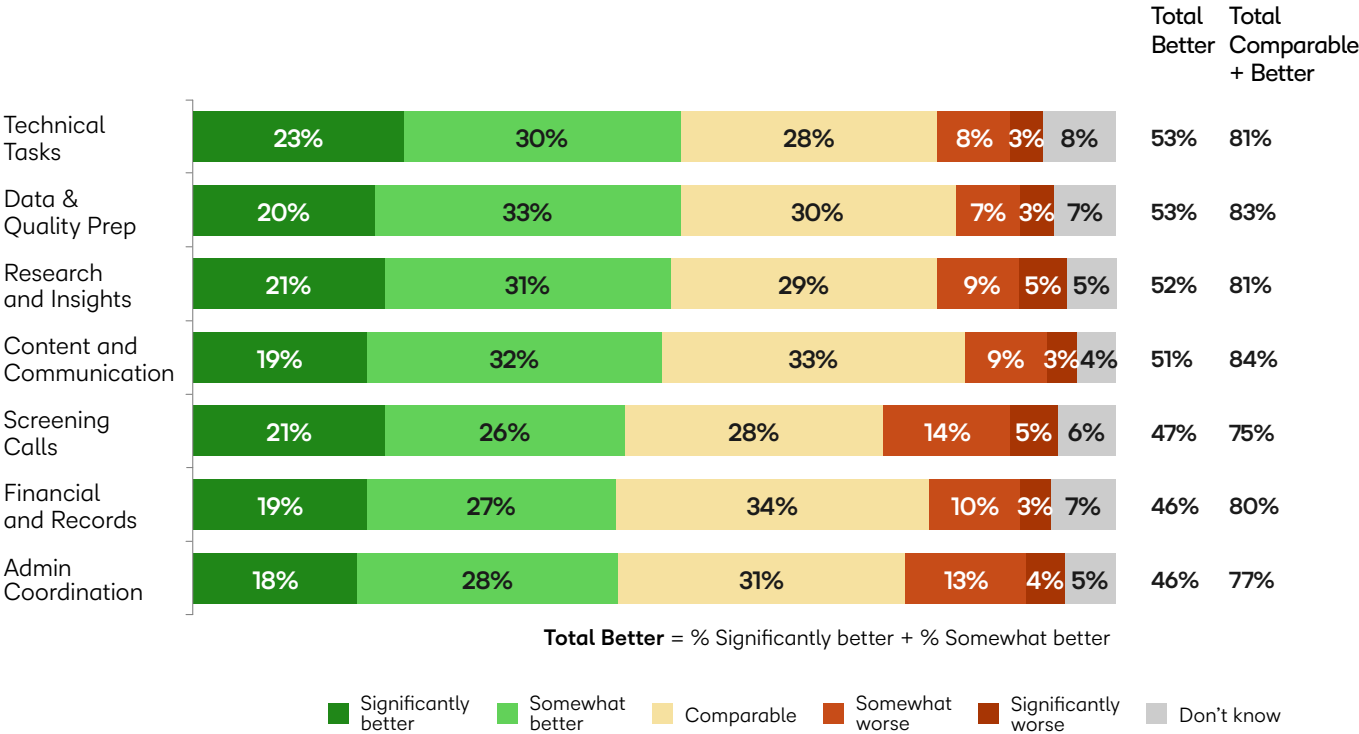


This shift may be further fueled by a growing perception by respondents that GenAI outputs in many tasks are comparable or better than entry-level worker outputs, a view shared by an overwhelming majority of our HR leaders surveyed [Fig. 4].

**FIGURE 4**

**Half of HR leaders rate GenAI output for these tasks as better than entry-level work, another three-in-ten say AI and entry-level employee outputs for these tasks are comparable.**

*How does the quality of GenAI output for these tasks compare to the work of an entry level-employee with 0–2 years of experience? Is the output worse, better or comparable?*



# Redefining Entry-Level Work

The current state is less about a decrease of jobs and more about an escalation of expectations. For the 64% of organizations expecting to increase entry-level hiring, the role of a junior employee is being fundamentally reconfigured from execution to oversight.

Two specific data points reveal the high-pressure environment into which these new workers are entering. For many organizations, AI is being used as a lever to stretch organizational capacity without expanding the size of their unexperienced workforce.

## 1. THE PRODUCTIVITY TRAP

Nearly half of HR leaders (48%) shared that while they aren't changing the number of entry-level workers they bring on, AI is increasing expectations for productivity across the board [Fig. 3]. This expectation grows to more than half (54%) in organizations of more than 1000 employees. This suggests a productivity trap where new graduates are expected to achieve a higher output volume from day one than has been typically expected of an entry-level employee, simply because they have access to GenAI. The learning curve is being compressed, leaving less room for the trial-and-error and cognitive struggle learning methods essential to professional growth and development of subject matter expertise.

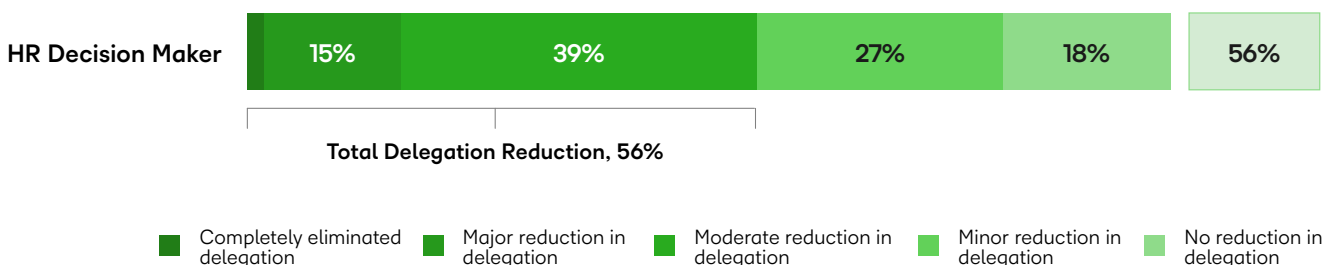
## 2. THE SENIORITY SHIFT

Perhaps most disruptive is the move toward senior substitution. As mentioned earlier, nearly a third of the HR leaders (30%) stated their talent strategy is shifting towards hiring fewer entry-level workers in favor of mid-level, experienced talent who use AI to complete those same entry-level tasks [Fig. 3]. However, a majority (56%) of respondents stated they are seeing a reduction in the number of basic tasks being delegated to junior employees due to GenAI [Fig. 5]. This suggests a growing gap in the future need for large ranks of entry-level employees, fueled by the overwhelming perception by respondents that GenAI outputs are comparable to or better than entry-level work outputs [Fig. 4].

**FIGURE 5**

**About half of HR leaders say they've reduced the delegation of basic tasks to junior associates due to GenAI at least moderately or more.**

*To what extent has GenAI usage reduced the need for senior staff to delegate basic tasks in the areas of research, writing/production, data analysis/accounting and administration to junior associates?*





## The Missing Rung

At risk from these shifts is the creation of a “missing rung” on the career ladder. Many organizations are effectively betting that a single mid-level manager plus GenAI is more valuable than a manager supported by entry-level associates. While this drives immediate efficiency, it bypasses the traditional talent pipeline model entirely.

If companies are skipping the entry-level tier by leaning on AI-powered senior employees, we are not just seeing a shift in hiring—we are seeing a deliberate bypass of the talent pipeline’s foundation.

While this shift toward AI in talent acquisition strategy is a cross-industry trend, at this time, the potential displacement factor is significantly more pronounced in

large organizations. HR leaders in enterprises with over 1,000 employees were more likely than those in smaller firms to indicate that AI was a factor overall (85%) and that it was leading to higher productivity expectations for entry-level workers (54%) [Fig. 3]. Smaller companies, on the other hand, were far more likely to report AI as not being a part of their talent acquisition strategy (26%) as opposed to their large employer counterparts (15%) [Fig. 3].

This suggests that larger companies are moving faster in AI adoption and the missing rung on the career ladder is forming most rapidly within the nation’s largest employers, where the scale of operations makes the efficiency gains of AI-led tasks even more attractive than traditional junior-level execution.

# Risk to the Talent Pipeline

The most significant danger identified in our research is not a sudden drop in hiring, but a slow-motion collapse of the professional development ladder. While organizations are finding ways to maintain productivity through AI, they are inadvertently dismantling the apprenticeship-like model that has been the predominant method of talent development.

## The Pipeline Paradox

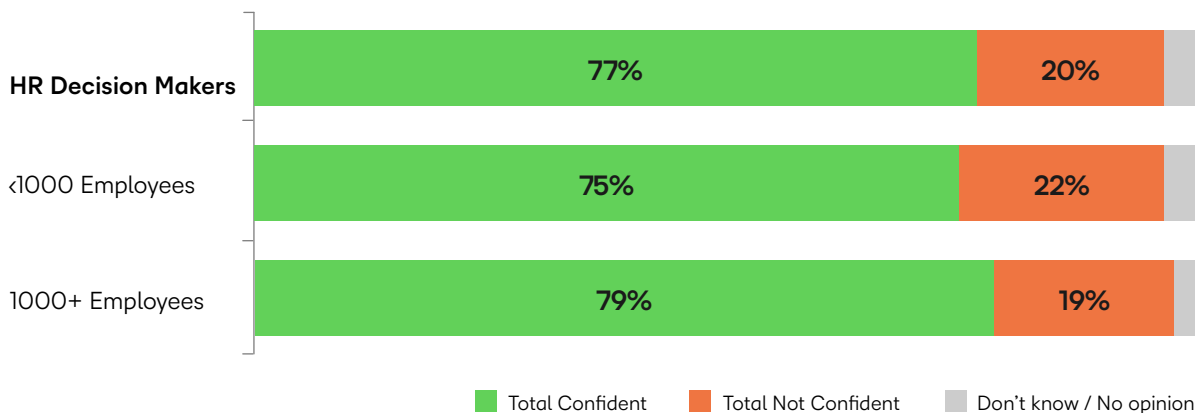
Our primary research reveals a pipeline paradox. A strong majority of HR leaders are confident in their current ability to develop future leaders [Fig. 6]. However, this confidence is significantly undermined by their long-term outlook.



**FIGURE 6**

**The majority of HR leaders across company size are confident in their organization's ability to develop future strategic leaders. Human skill gaps are seen as most difficult to fill.**

*Without entry-level roles to provide experiential learning and natural, on-the-job knowledge transfer, how confident are you in your organization's ability to develop future strategic leaders?*



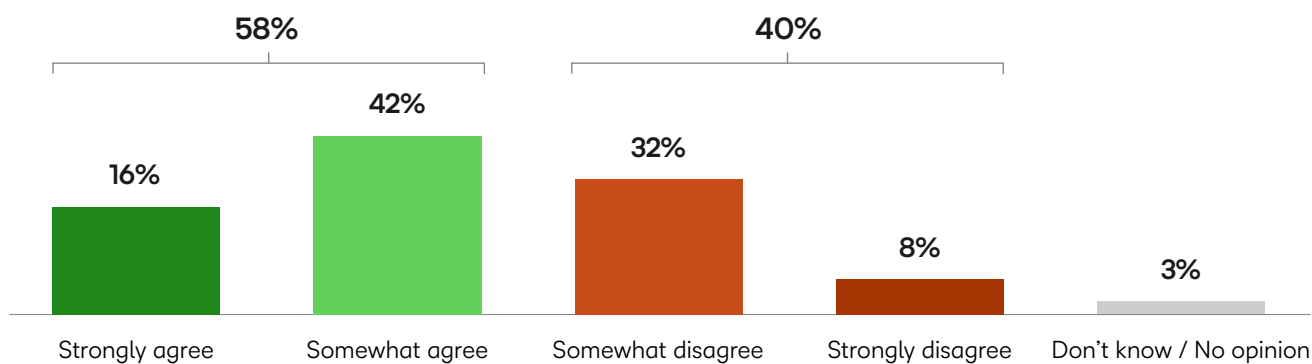


A clear majority (58%) of HR leaders agree that reducing entry-level roles today in lieu of AI tools may create a shortage of qualified senior leaders within just five years [Fig. 7]. As highlighted earlier, the rate at which task load and productivity expectations are both growing for entry-level workers and offloaded to more senior workers suggests that this shortage may be upon us sooner rather than later.

**FIGURE 7**

**Many HR leaders who expect hiring for entry-level roles to decline also foresee senior leadership shortages within five years as a result of AI-driven role reduction.**

*Please rate your agreement with the following statements: The reduction of entry-level roles today as a result of AI tools will create a shortage of qualified senior leaders in our organization within five years.*





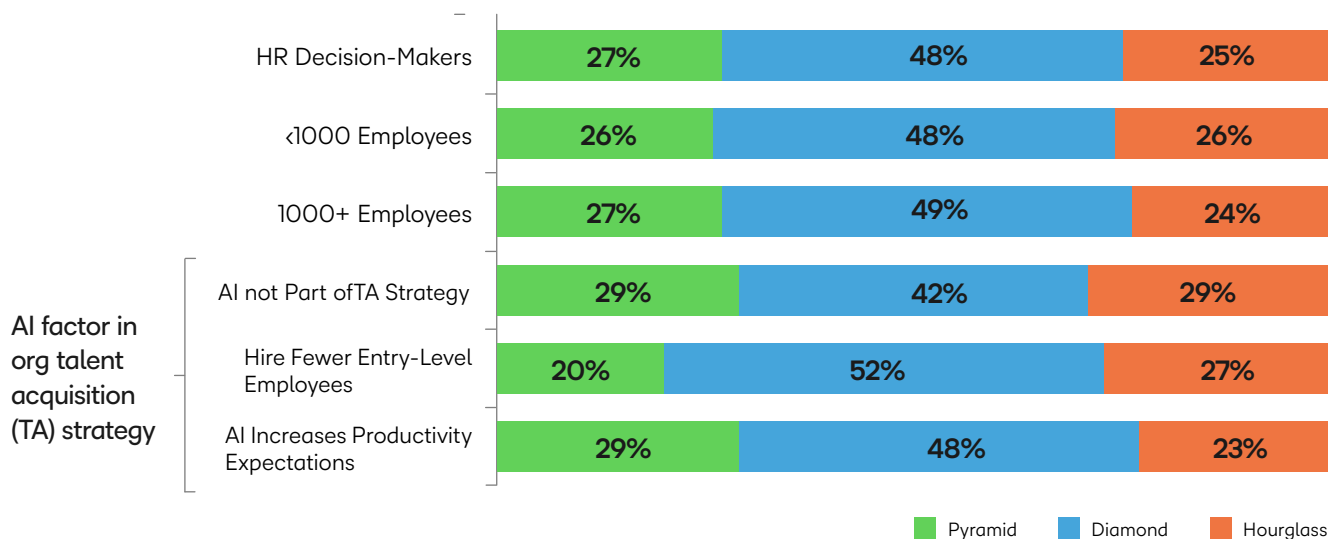
In fact, nearly half of survey respondents envision a future workforce that is more of a “diamond” shape with a large mid-level workforce but relatively fewer entry-level and senior positions if current trends persist [Fig. 8]. Alignment with that view increases for employers whose talent acquisition strategy includes AI as a factor in reduced entry-level hiring or increased productivity expectations.

Organizations are capturing immediate efficiency gains by automating junior tasks, but the potential downside impact on how those junior employees eventually become the senior decision-makers is a clear risk.

**FIGURE 8**

**About half of HR leaders across all company sizes envision a “diamond” workforce—heavy on mid-level roles, fewer junior roles—if this trend continues.**

*If the current trend continues, how do you describe the shape of your future workforce structure relative to your current workforce structure?*



# The Loss of Cognitive Struggle and Experiential Learning

The downstream effects are already visible in the changing nature of entry-level work. A study from the MIT Media Lab, suggests that GenAI may be associated with eroding critical thinking by removing the cognitive struggle required to master a craft (Kosmyrna et al., 2025). Traditionally, subject matter expertise is forged in the grind of the hours spent, for example, researching, drafting and synthesizing data. These tasks are not just administrative; they are the fundamental building blocks of deep knowledge.

When AI does the heavy lifting of these knowledge-building tasks, the entry-level worker shifts from a creator to a consumer of information.

If AI does the thinking and drafting of work, junior employees may lose the very struggle necessary to develop that expertise. At the same time, the D2L research shows HR leaders believe that GenAI actually makes experiential learning on the job easier for entry-level employees [Fig. 9].

**FIGURE 9**

**HR leaders who indicated AI is part of their TA strategy are more likely to say GenAI makes most experiential learning opportunities easier than those not incorporating AI in their TA strategy.**

*How is GenAI impacting these experiential learning opportunities traditionally inherent in junior-level roles?*

Total easier (% Much easier + % Somewhat easier)	HR laeaders	AI not Part of TA Strategy	AI Part of TA Strategy: Hire Fewer Entry-Level Employees	AI Part of TA Strategy: AI Increases Productivity Expectations
Learning on the job (i.e. gaining subject matter expertise)	67%	56%	70%	70%
Ability to demonstrate creativity in accomplishing tasks	64%	54%	66%	67%
Opportunities for communication with colleagues (i.e. networking, presentations)	59%	49%	66%	59%
Opportunities to receive feedback and coaching	58%	42%	67%	60%
Opportunities to communicate with external stakeholders	50%	29%	63%	51%

This raises a critical question for the future of workforce development. What, exactly, are junior employees learning? If the “struggle” of developing the craft is removed, then is the development of the craft lost or diminished? Are new hires learning the nuances of their industry, or are they simply learning how to manage the machine?

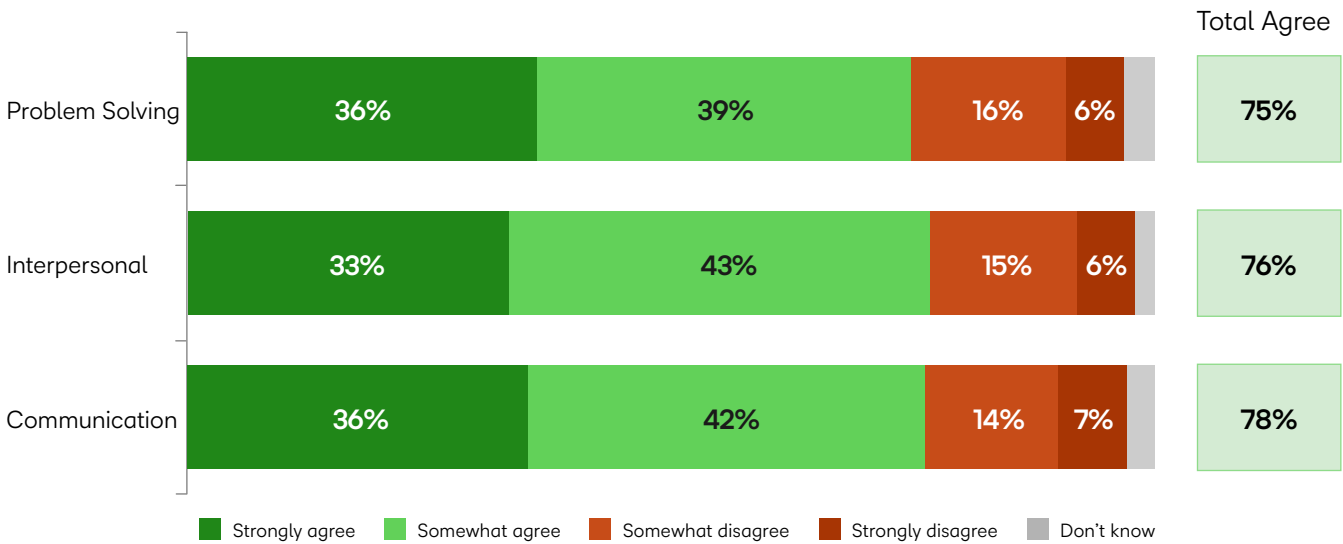
Despite the belief that AI makes learning “easier,” strong majorities of HR leaders report that gaps in problem-solving, interpersonal and communication skills are actually worsening among recent entry-level hires compared to just 3–5 years ago [Fig. 10]. This suggests that while AI can shortcut or explain a task, it cannot replace the learning-by-doing that occurs when a junior employee has to navigate a complex project without a machine-generated shortcut.



**FIGURE 10**

**Strong majorities say problem solving, interpersonal and communication skills gaps are worsening among recent entry-level hires compared to 3–5 years ago.**

*Based on what you know, do you agree or disagree that the skills gaps for the following skills amongst the entry-level roles your company has hired for in the past 0–2 years are worse compared to those hired the prior 3–5 years?*



This is reflected in the desired skill sets for entry-level employees. When HR leaders were asked what universities should prioritize as subject matter knowledge tasks become automated, they emphasized human-centric audit skills over technical execution [Fig. 11], including:

critical thinking to manage

- AI outputs (54% ranked as top 1 or 2 priority)
- emotional intelligence/personal skills (44%)
- Subject matter expertise (43%)

By removing the active participation in routine knowledge work tasks, we may be removing the very foundation upon which these skills and professional expertise are built.

**FIGURE 11**

**HR leaders across business size and TA strategy seek critical thinking and synthesis skills the most to manage AI’s output if entry-level tasks become increasingly automated.**

*If entry-level job tasks become increasingly automated, what is the primary attribute you now need universities to prioritize in new graduates? Please rank, on a scale of 1 to 5, how much universities should prioritize each of the following attributes if entry-level job tasks become increasingly automated, where 1 is the top priority and 5 is the lowest priority.*

% Rank 1 + 2	HR leaders	<1000 Employees	1000+ Employees
Complex critical thinking and synthesis (managing the AI’s output)	54%	55%	53%
Emotional intelligence/ Interpersonal skills	44%	46%	42%
Deep technical/subject matter expertise (to verify AI accuracy)	43%	43%	43%
Advanced “prompt engineering”/AI literacy	36%	33%	42%
Client Management	23%	25%	21%

# The Impacts on Employee Hiring and Development

The data reveals a stark disconnect between organizational optimism and operational reality. While 77% of HR leaders express confidence in their current ability to develop future strategic leaders [Fig. 12], this confidence appears to be built on a crumbling foundation.

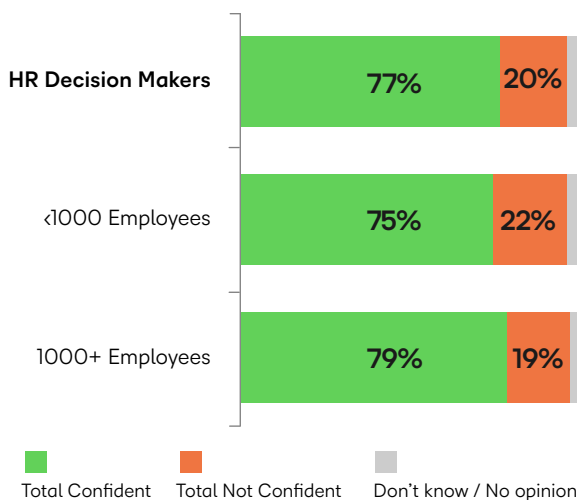
Nearly the same number (69%) state that human skills are the hardest to fill [Fig. 12], and nearly three quarters of respondents (74%) admit they do not have active upskilling or employee development programs in place to replace the vital on-the-job learning and informal knowledge transfer currently being lost to AI automation [Fig. 13].

**FIGURE 12**

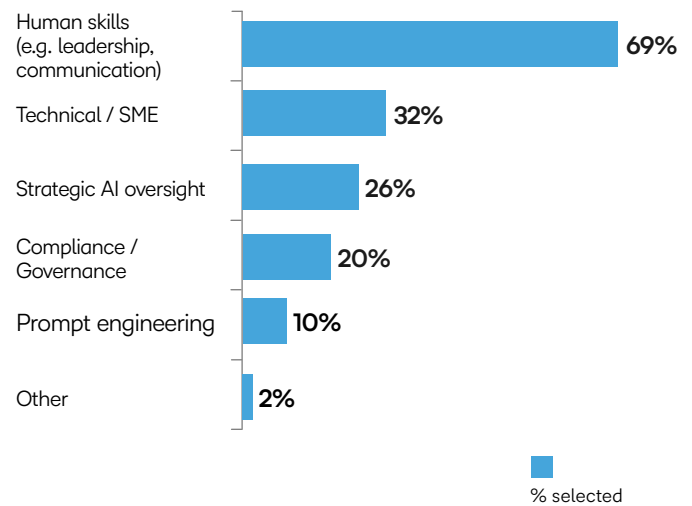
**The majority of HR leaders across all company sizes are confident in their organization’s ability to develop future strategic leaders. Human skill gaps are seen as most difficult to fill.**

*Without entry-level roles to provide experiential learning and natural, on-the-job knowledge transfer, how confident are you in your organization’s ability to develop future strategic leaders? Assuming that integration of GenAI is reducing, or will reduce, the number of entry and junior-level employees, which one or two skill gaps are currently, or do you anticipate being, the most difficult to fill in your mid-level management tier as it relates to integrating AI skills? Please select up to two.*

**Confidence in Ability to Develop Future Leaders**



**Difficult to Fill Skills for Mid-Level Management**



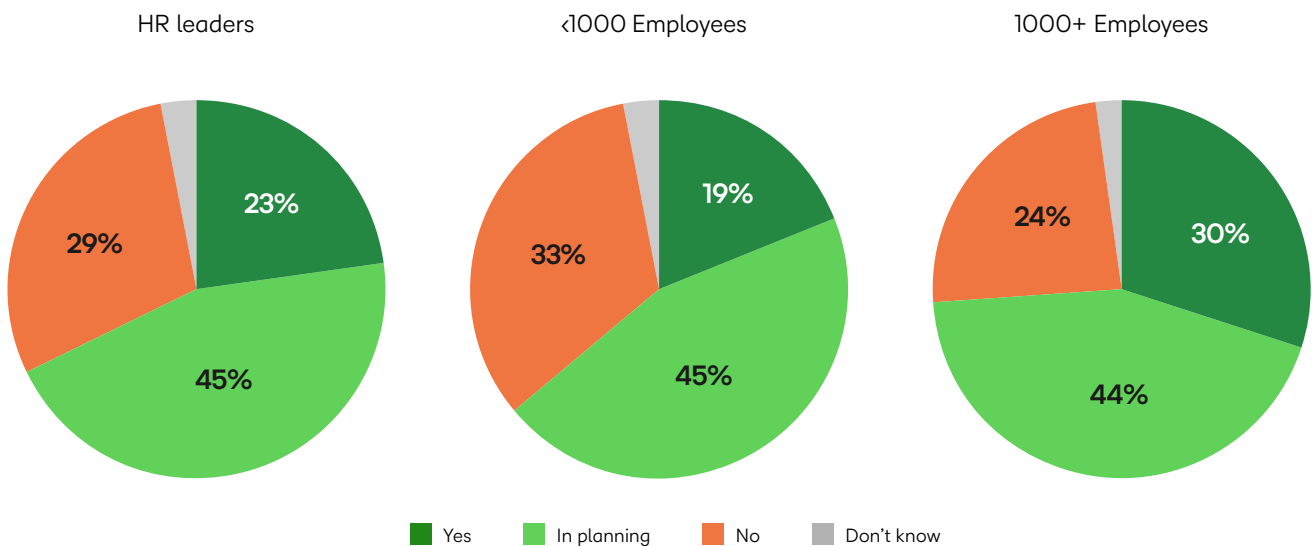


This preparation gap suggests that many leaders are relying on legacy development models that are no longer compatible with an AI-augmented workflow. If the entry-level tasks that once served as the “classroom” for professional growth are disappearing, confidence in leadership development could become a hope rather than a strategy.

**FIGURE 13**

**While most HR leaders have replacements for on-the-job training and learning that is being lost to AI, the plurality say it is currently in planning.**

*Do you currently have a formal mechanism to replace the “on-the-job training and learning” typically gained in entry-level roles that is being lost to automation via AI?*



# Recommendations for Entry-Level Learning

To close this gap, talent leaders should invest in intentional interventions. The following models offer a blueprint for replacing the missing rungs of the career ladder:



**Strategic learning programs:** Organizations should invest in intensive programs that move beyond functional onboarding to build institutional knowledge regarding core operations, market conditions and complex decision-making factors. This intentional immersion would serve to replace the incidental exposure of entry-level work with structured, long-term learning, more rapidly accelerating entry-level hires toward the level of an experienced employee who deeply understands the business.



**Internal apprenticeships and rotational programs:** Consider moving beyond traditional hiring and implement structured internal apprenticeships as an alternative to entry-level roles. These programs should rotate apprentices across various business functions to provide broad-based exposure and reintroduce the cognitive struggle through complex problem solving under senior mentorship. The explicit objective is to cultivate the deep institutional knowledge required to transition the apprentice directly into an “experienced” full-time position upon completion.



**Co-designed work-integrated learning:** To ensure graduates are day-one ready, the traditional boundary between higher education and the workplace should be reduced. By co-designing curriculum and co-op experiences with universities, employers can help prepare students for the human-plus-AI workflows they will encounter in the field. This turns the degree more into a multi-year practical internship, rather than just an abstract or academic-only precursor to work.



**AI-simulated training environments:** If repetitive work is being automated away, organizations should consider deploying AI-simulated environments to help replicate the complexity of those tasks. High-fidelity simulations delivered through modern learning platforms can provide safe spaces for new hires to practice critical decision-making, client management and problem-solving at scale. This could potentially manufacture the years of experience that automation has removed.



**Skills-based hiring:** Organizations should shift to hiring frameworks that prioritize verifiable competencies over static credentials. By utilizing evidence-of-work, skill or knowledge portfolios, recruiters can evaluate a candidate’s ability to interpret AI outputs and apply the critical thinking and communication skills required to manage the high-stakes human plus AI workflows of the modern workforce.

**The shift in hiring is already underway.** The shift in learning and development must follow.

# Implications for Higher Education

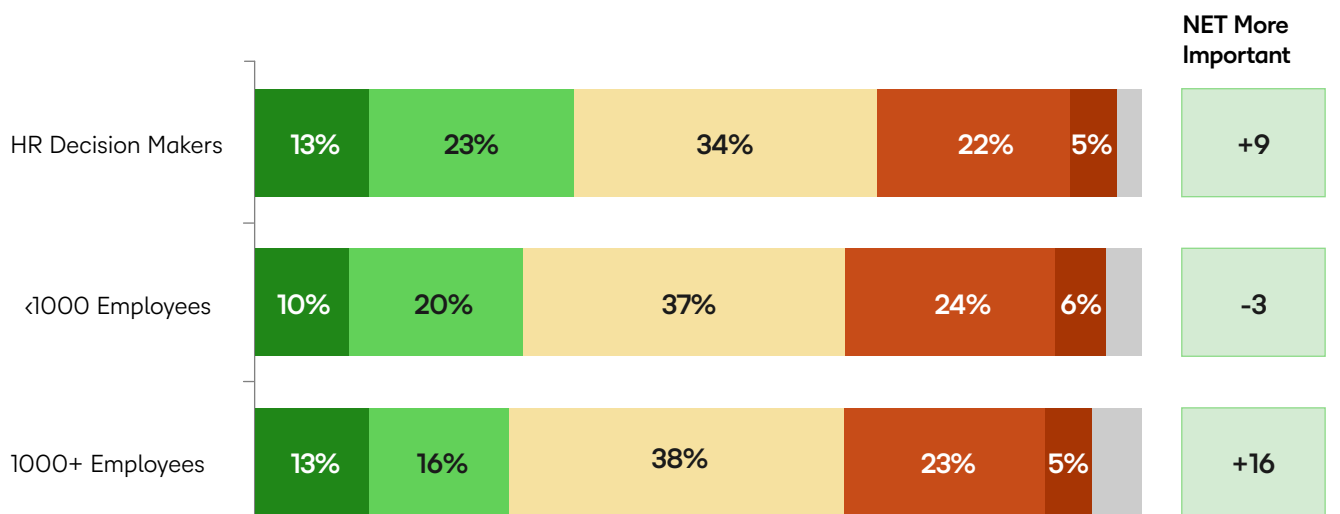
For leaders in higher education, the data reveals a fundamental shift in the value proposition of a degree. While the credential itself remains a vital signal of capability—the majority of HR leaders (70%) still view a degree as a key indicator of talent [Fig. 14]—the contents of that degree are being scrutinized through a new, utilitarian lens.

The era of the degree as a generalist’s rite of passage is giving way to a period of intense focus on specific, durable competencies and skills.

**FIGURE 14**

**The 4-year degree remains more important than demonstrated skills—particularly at larger companies—but it is losing ground, with one-quarter of respondents saying it is less important.**

*Given that GenAI can perform many foundational tasks, how has the relative value of a 4-year degree changed in your hiring criteria compared to demonstrated skills, knowledge and experience?*



NET Degree is More Important = Total More Important % Degree is significantly more important + % Degree is somewhat more important - Total Less Important % Degree is significantly less important + % Degree is somewhat less important

- Degree is significantly more important
- Degree is somewhat more important
- Degree is neither more nor less important
- Degree is somewhat less important
- Degree is significantly less important
- Don't know



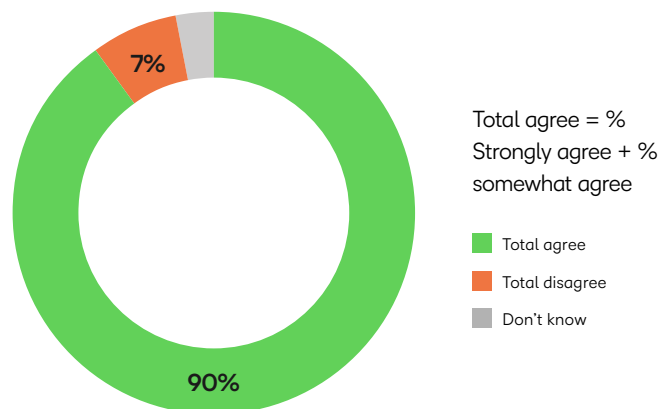
## The Shift to Skills-Based Validation

Despite the continued relevance of the degree, there is an overwhelming interest (90%) among employers in shifting toward skills-based hiring [Fig. 15]. For universities to support graduates, this means that a transcript alone is no longer enough. Employers are looking for evidence of specific high-value attributes that allow a graduate to “plug and play” into an AI-augmented environment.

**FIGURE 15**

**There is near universal support from HR leaders for skill-based hiring, rather than hiring for specific roles.**

*To what extent do you agree with this statement:  
We must shift from hiring specific roles to hiring  
for skill sets and potential.*



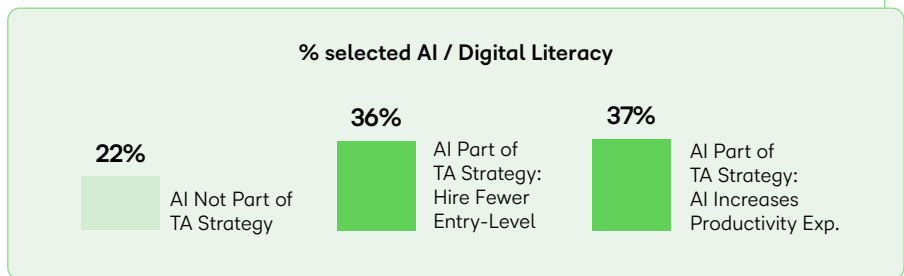
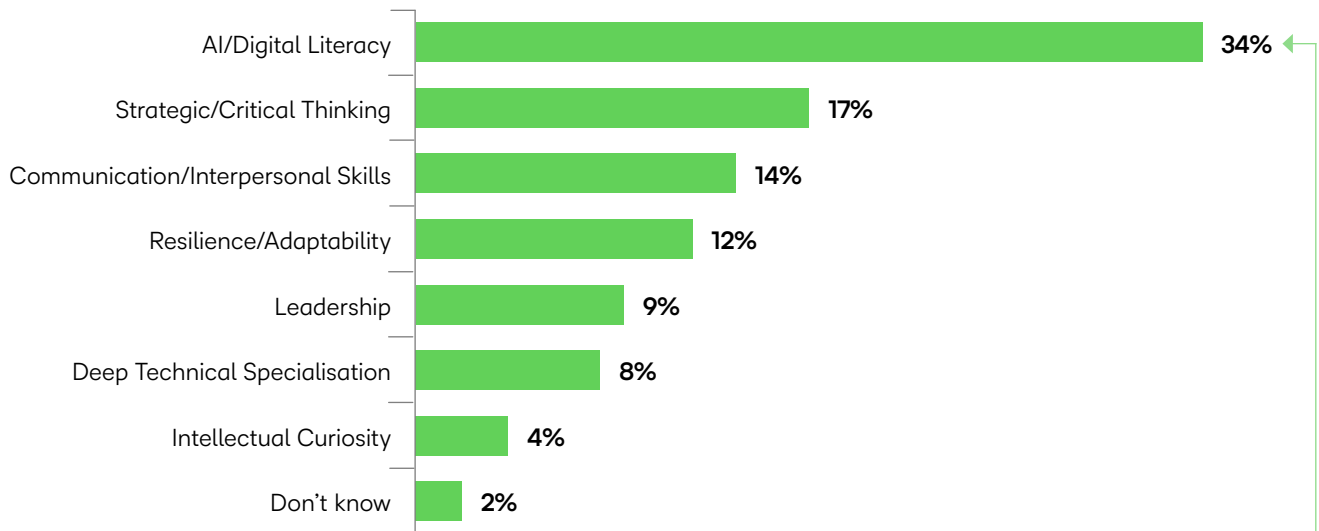
According to our research [Fig. 16], the top three critical skills employers are currently seeking in new hires are:

1. **AI/digital literacy:** Not just the ability to use tools, but the fluency to manage them
2. **Strategic/critical thinking:** The ability to audit and interpret AI outputs rather than just generating them
3. **Communication/interpersonal skills:** The human-centric layer that AI cannot replicate

**FIGURE 16**

**AI and digital literacy are now the top critical attribute employers seek, followed by critical thinking and communication skills.**

*What is the single most critical attribute you now require from university graduates that was less important five years ago?*





## The Widening Skill Gap

There is a paradox in the current talent market that higher education is uniquely positioned to solve. While organizations are seeking high-level cognitive and interpersonal skills, they report that these attributes are increasingly scarce. In fact, employers are seeing worsening gaps in problem-solving, interpersonal and communication skills among recent entry-level hires compared to just 3–5 years ago [Fig. 10].

This soft skill recession appears to be exacerbated by two compounding factors:



### **The cognitive struggle atrophy:**

As described earlier with regard to entry-level job impacts, when students rely on GenAI to draft their emails, summarize their readings and solve basic problems, the muscles for critical thinking and interpersonal nuance begin to atrophy which only compounds as they enter the workforce and continue those same practices.



### **The COVID-19 developmental tail:**

We must also acknowledge the historical context of the current graduate cohort. Today's entry-level workers are among the first to enter the workforce after bearing the brunt of COVID-19 learning impacts during their formative high school years. The loss of consistent in-person socialization and the disruptions to traditional classroom rigor during 2020–2022 may have contributed to a foundational gap in interpersonal and collaborative development that is only now manifesting in the professional world.

Combined, these factors create a perfect storm. A workforce entering with a developmental deficit that is then being met by an AI-augmented work environment that no longer requires—or allows—they to practice the very skills they lack.

# Recommendations for Higher Education Strategy

To remain a primary engine of the talent pipeline, higher education institutions should consider the following pivots:



**Embed “machine management” into every discipline:** AI literacy must transition from a standalone technical elective into an integrated competency across all disciplines. Rather than treating AI as the sole province of computer science, institutions should empower students in all fields like nursing, history, and business to direct these technologies and strategically adapt workflows. The goal is a graduate who leverages AI as a sophisticated assistant while maintaining the critical thinking necessary to validate outputs, ensure ethical application and determine the best use of the technology.



**Prioritize high-stakes interpersonal learning:** Since employers report worsening gaps in communication and emotional intelligence, institutions should double down on synchronous, collaborative and high-stakes interpersonal experiences—like oral defenses, live negotiations and team-based problem solving—that GenAI cannot bypass.



**The evidence-of-work portfolio:** To meet the demand for skills-based hiring, programs should move toward portfolio-based assessments that demonstrate a student’s process, not just their final output. Showing how a student used AI to iterate on a project is more valuable to a 2026 recruiter than a perfectly polished final paper.



**Skills-based transcripts:** Institutions should transition from traditional, course-centric transcripts to skills-indexed digital records or comprehensive learner records. This evolution would provide a verifiable list of specific competencies that directly facilitates skills-based hiring models. By providing a granular map of a student’s demonstrated capabilities, these transcripts could help recruiters more effectively evaluate a graduate’s potential to jump into experienced roles or demonstrate the skillsets to operate in a modern, AI-augmented environment.



# Rethinking Talent Development in the age of AI

The D2L commissioned survey data makes one thing clear: At this time, the job apocalypse is not a crash, but a significant reconfiguration. While the volume of entry-level hiring is not plummeting, according to our survey and the Federal Reserve data (2026), the internal support beams of entry-level work—cognitive struggle and learning-by-doing—are being hollowed out by a combination of rapid AI adoption and historical learning disruptions.

To prevent a structural collapse of the talent pipeline, stakeholders must act now:



**For employers:** Move beyond “productivity gains” and reinvest that saved time into structured internal apprenticeships for entry-level workers, ongoing upskilling and strategic learning programs, and partnerships with higher education and professional/training organizations. If AI is doing the junior work, your junior staff must be intentionally prepared to do senior work.



**For higher education:** Evolve the degree from a static credential to a dynamic portfolio of skills, grow and update your continuing education programs, and mature industry partnerships. Focus on the human-plus-AI workflow, prioritizing the critical thinking and interpersonal nuances that machines—and pandemic-disrupted learning—have left behind.

The pipeline paradox is the ultimate warning sign. If 58% of HR leaders can envision a pipeline leadership shortage within five years due to the impact of AI on entry-level work, and task consolidation and offloading begins to consume entry-level work [Fig. 7], organizations may need to move beyond viewing AI simply as a tool for immediate efficiency. We must treat it as a catalyst for a total redesign of how we train and promote human talent. The house is still standing, but the time to reinforce the foundation is today.

# Acknowledgments

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# D2L

## ABOUT D2L

D2L is a global learning innovation company, reshaping the future of education and work. We're leading the way into a new era of personalized learning, driven by the belief that everyone deserves access to high-quality education, regardless of their age, ability or location. Our signature technology product—D2L Brightspace—enhances the learning experience for millions of learners at every stage of life, from the earliest days of school to the working world.

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