

Five Ways People Leaders Are Bringing AI to Their Organizations

CHROs Discuss How Artificial Intelligence Is Reshaping The People Function And The Future Of Work.

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As we talk to CHROs globally, one thing is unmistakable: AI isn't just another tool landing in HR. It's reshaping how People Leaders work, collaborate, and lead organizational change.

Some are owning this space directly and others are deepening collaboration with their Tech-focused colleagues, but in either case, most have moved past running AI pilots and are now incorporating AI within the HR function and across their organizations. AI, and its impact on processes, people, and culture, is now undeniably part of the People Leader's responsibilities.

The experimentation and acceptance of AI tools feels different from past tech waves. The expectations are higher, the pace is faster, and no one is entirely sure what "good" looks like yet. But, as we connected insights from our **The CHRO Voice** series, forward-looking CHROs are stepping forcefully into the AI frontier and ensuring that this innovation dramatically enhances the value HR can bring to an organization.

Here are five ways People Leaders are approaching AI today.

1. Building the Foundations for Responsible AI in HR

Before AI can empower people, organizations must build the right ethical and data foundations.

At Aramark, CHRO **Abigail Charpentier** approached AI implementation by first ensuring solid ground rules. "When we first encountered AI at Aramark, we approached it from a compliance perspective because we didn't want people getting in trouble or getting us in trouble," she said. Her team established AI governance early, codifying safe data practices and clear dos and don'ts.

But building confidence mattered as much as setting rules. “Some thought, ‘I don’t know if I want to try this because what if I inadvertently do something wrong.’ To address this, we’ve been exposing our leadership to AI more, helping them learn and explore its possibilities.”

That education-forward approach is shared by **Cindy Fiedelman**, CHRO of Digital Realty, who sees AI as one of her top five priorities but recognizes that infrastructure comes first. “We’ve had to first focus on integrating our systems post-acquisition to establish a solid data baseline before piling on more tools,” she noted. Only once that foundation is in place, she added, can HR move from automation to insight.

The takeaway: Responsible AI begins with trust—both in the systems and in the people using them.

2. From Automation to Enablement

Across sectors, CHROs are using AI to remove friction and free people to focus on higher-value work.

At Aimbridge Hospitality, CHRO **Ann Christenson** described the future of AI as “smart enablement.” Her team uses AI to automate interview scheduling and candidate screening—saving hours for hiring managers while improving the candidate experience. “If someone’s looking for a policy, they shouldn’t have to sift through 700 documents,” she said. “They should have what they need at their fingertips so they can focus on running a great hotel, not chasing paperwork.”

Similarly, at Carter’s Inc., SVP of Human Resources **Jill Wilson** shared how the company implemented an AI recruiting assistant called Alicia. The chatbot accelerates frontline hiring, particularly during seasonal peaks. “AI will not take human jobs; it will take humans’ jobs who do not embrace AI,” she reflected. “It’s not about losing your job to AI but about partnering with it. Embrace AI, and you’ll thrive.”

For **Harsha Jalihal**, Chief People Officer at MongoDB, automation and personalization are converging. Her team is piloting an employee-support chatbot capable of answering policy and benefits questions instantly—everything from leave balances to eligibility details. “It frees up HR teams to focus on more complex work,” she said, “and employees don’t have to wait for someone to get back to them.”

The thread is clear: AI is not replacing HR, but expanding its capacity to serve.

3. Connecting People and Opportunity at Scale

AI's most powerful impact may be its ability to connect people and potential across large organizations.

Stephanie Lilak, EVP and Chief People Officer of Mondelēz International, described a holistic approach where HR is fully integrated into the company's digital journey. "We're looking at technology beyond HR. We want to leverage it for better HR, but also have HR be part of the technology and digital journey of the company," she explained.

Mondelēz's *Match and Grow* program uses AI and machine learning to connect employees with short-term development assignments and internal mentors—an innovation that helps a 90,000-person organization feel truly connected.

Lilak's team also partners closely with IT and Legal to ensure ethical use and encourage adoption. "About 20% of the actual success is the system or technology that you're implementing," she said. "The remaining 80% of the success is attributed to how well you are thinking about it from an organizational perspective, from a people and talent perspective, and from a change management perspective."

The takeaway: AI can truly personalize learning experiences and enable upskilling, opening new pathways for employee growth.

4. Humanizing AI Adoption

While enthusiasm for AI runs high, CHROs are united in ensuring the human remains at the center.

At Marriott International, EVP and CHRO Ty Breland co-sponsors the company's enterprise AI strategy alongside the heads of Technology and Customer Experience. When deploying generative AI in customer engagement centers, his team began by asking frontline agents about their pain points. "Their feedback lined up exactly with what our data said," he explained. "But by asking them the question and letting them voice where they felt the opportunity was when we deployed the solution; it was aligned with what they asked for and resulted in a successful implementation."

The result wasn't a replacement of people, but an augmentation of their work. Marriott has since extended experimentation to performance management—using AI to help associates craft more creative and ambitious goals.

Sarah Siddiqui, CHRO of Nordson Corporation, also sees potential for AI to strengthen internal mobility by identifying hidden skills and surfacing ready-now talent. The company has excelled in bringing in external talent. At the same time, as she explains, there is a desire to strengthen growth from within. "I'd love to connect AI to talent—whether it's identifying internal matches, surfacing hidden skills, or improving development pathways," she notes.

The message: AI can be highly participatory.

5. Coaching, Curiosity, and Continuous Learning

Some leaders are using AI to democratize access to coaching and development, scaling growth in new ways.

Allison Pinkham, CHRO of Galderma, is piloting an AI-powered coaching tool for mid-level managers. “We call it a ‘coach in your pocket,’ someone they can turn to for guidance, to role-play scenarios,” she said. For a lean organization, she sees this as a practical way to provide real-time support and expand development opportunities without large budgets.

Across these companies, a common theme emerges: learning and experimentation are central to adoption. As Aramark’s **Charpentier** put it, “If we don’t continue to engage with AI, it will pass us by. The barriers to entry will become exponential, and we’ll be struggling to catch up.”

A Strategic Shift in the CHRO Agenda

Beyond tools and pilots, CHROs view AI as a lens through which to redefine the People function. For many, that means leading the conversation about ethics, workforce design, and the future of jobs.

At Digital Realty, **Fiedelman** summed it up: “AI can be valuable for resume screening and talent acquisition basics, but true employee development still requires human interaction.” And at Mondelēz, **Lilak** framed it as a broader organizational challenge: “The real opportunity here is to remove low-value-added work from processes and systems to create space for people to do higher-value-added work.”

At Nordson Corporation, **Siddiqui** shares that curiosity. “The biggest unknown—and also what I’m most excited about—is the change AI will bring to the workplace,” she said. While acknowledging productivity gains, she believes the real opportunity lies in strategy. “How can AI help drive business strategy? That’s where it gets interesting.”

For HR leaders, this dual mandate—accelerating technological capability for maximum impact while protecting the human core of the enterprise—is a clear defining challenge.

The Human Edge

Yes, AI will transform the world of work—but it won’t replace what makes work human.

The CHROs leading this charge are pragmatic experimenters. They’re advancing AI with empathy, transparency, and an insistence on ethics. Their goal isn’t to automate HR, it’s to elevate it. But here’s the challenge: Experimenting is no longer enough. The moment for small-scale trials has passed. To truly integrate AI, People Leaders must move from pilots to practice, from learning to leading and move their organizations through this new shift, one that will impact us all for years to come.

At Egon Zehnder, our work with **CHROs** and executive teams focuses on helping leaders make sense of this shift—strengthening the conditions for thoughtful, future-ready decisions as the landscape continues to evolve.

If you’d like to explore these themes further or reflect on what they mean for your own organization, we’d be glad to continue the conversation.