CAHRS Working Group – HR for HR: Building the Future-Ready HR Function
November 5, 2026



Participating Companies:

Carrier

Caterpillar

Corning Inc.

IBM

Medtronic

Procter & Gamble

TE Connectivity Ltd.

XPO Inc.

Quick Recap

The session focused on building a future-ready HR function and the role of HR for HR, covering HR skills and competencies, career development, HR operating models, and burnout. Participants discussed AI and digital fluency as the top capability priority; AI-first workshops and innovation labs; tools for coaching and mentoring; data literacy; the balance between internal and external hiring; the shift toward automation and the blurring of HR and IT; and the importance of relationships, well-being initiatives, and dedicated development time in addressing HR burnout and moral injury.

Key Takeaways

- AI and digital fluency ranked as the top HR capability priority and also the biggest challenge; only 12% of organizations report using HR data extensively for decision making.
- Organizations are building AI capability through persona-based development, workshops, and structured innovation labs, with the message that AI complements rather than replaces human work.
- Mentoring and coaching are the most effective career development models, but manager time and capacity are a barrier; AI-enabled platforms are being used to democratize access.
- 80% of HR leaders report their functions are undergoing transformation, with HR-to-employee ratios shifting from 1:70 toward 1:200 through automation and AI, and HR and IT increasingly sharing leadership.
- HR professionals report higher burnout than non-HR employees (54% moderate to severe versus 48%), and organizations are responding with personal relationships, well-being initiatives, and dedicated HR development days.

Key Themes

1. HR Skills & Competencies

CAHRS led the working group and presented research on the competencies HR functions need most.

- AI and digital fluency ranked as the top priority, followed by organizational design and effectiveness, data analytics, business acumen, and strategic partnering. Change management and learning agility were also discussed.
- AI and digital fluency is also the biggest challenge, with only 12% of organizations using HR data extensively for decision making (vs. reporting).
- CAHRS research also found that mentoring and coaching are the most effective career development tools, but that manager time and capacity limit their use.
- One partner shared that it builds AI and digital fluency through persona-based development, focusing on specific roles rather than general AI literacy.
- Another partner is building AI capabilities through workshops and education, emphasizing that AI complements rather than replaces human work.
- They also described a shift from automation in general toward understanding the specific tasks that can be automated and described challenges with dashboard development and data reporting.
- Several partners noted that an AI coaching tool has been used successfully.

- Another partner reported strong results from its AI Innovation Labs and shared its experience with mentoring technology.
  - AI adoption increased from 61% to 92% in FY26, with a 20% participation rate.
  - The Innovation Labs use structured office hours in which mentors help participants brainstorm solutions to real-time HR challenges.
  - The next iteration begins in January and will expand to 25 mentors.
  - One mentoring platform has been successful in democratizing mentoring and career coaching, allowing organic matching between mentors and mentees and providing skill mapping.
- Another partner noted strengthened capabilities in strategic partnering and consulting.

2. HR Career Development

- Research shows that 51% say career development is delivered most effectively through human relationships — mentoring, coaching, and manager conversations — not formal systems like competency frameworks or mobility tools.
- That means it lives or dies on manager bandwidth, the same resource constraint that shows up in HR's own burnout data (62% cite this as a top barrier to delivering career development).
- Learning agility is the meta-capability underlying every other capability an HR professional can build.
- One partner shared strengths developed through transformation and the tools it uses for career development.
  - Learning agility and resilience as key strengths, developed through organizational transformation.
  - They use a combination of in-house built bots and a third-party AI coaching platform, but struggle to track usage metrics.
- Another partner described how its company is using technology for career development and how it approaches hiring and HR operating model change.
  - They recently activated flex work opportunities and mentorship capabilities within their HR information system, with a focus on identifying talent earlier in career stages rather than relying solely on senior directors.
  - They balance internal and external hiring, noting that external hires are sometimes necessary for critical skills or roles.

3. HR Operating Models and Transformation

- CAHRS research shows 80% of HR leaders report their functions are undergoing transformation.
- Organizations are shifting from 1:70 to 1:200 HR-to-employee ratios through automation and AI.
- Several participating companies are integrating HR and IT functions under shared leadership, while others are maintaining current shared services models.

4. HR Burnout

- CAHRS research shows 54% of HR professionals experiencing moderate to severe burnout, compared with 48% of non-HR employees.

- Participants shared strategies for managing moral injury (acting against your own values at work) in HR roles, including building personal relationships with colleagues, well-being initiatives, and dedicated HR development days.

Implications for Building a Future-Ready HR Function

- Build AI and digital fluency by role or persona, and pair it with stronger data literacy and use of HR data in decisions.
- Make hands-on learning structures, such as innovation labs and office hours, part of AI adoption.
- Expand mentoring and coaching access through technology while addressing manager capacity.
- Take deliberate risks on internal candidates while recognizing when external hires are needed for critical skills.
- Plan for HR operating model change, including automation, wider HR-to-employee ratios, and closer HR and IT alignment.
- Treat burnout and moral injury as a design issue for HR roles, supported by relationships, well-being initiatives, and training for line managers to keep issues off HR's desk.



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