



# The Forever Forward HR Leader

The evolving role of HR Leaders in Asia-Pacific and Japan



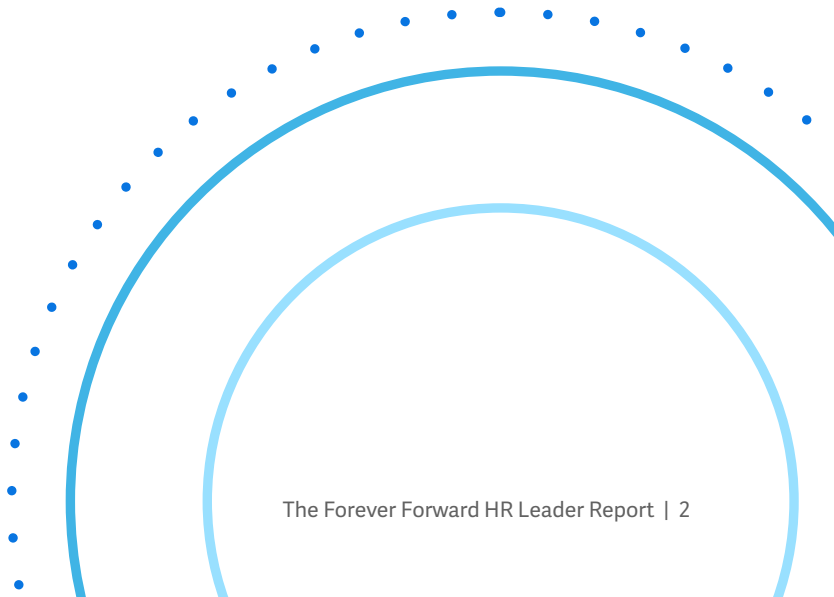
In collaboration with **mccrindle**

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## The Forever Forward HR Leader

In just the last few years, we have witnessed the greatest transformation to work in a century. The rapid rise of AI and machine learning, the shift towards hybrid and decentralised work, and redefined employee expectations have reshaped the world of work, and in turn the role of Human Resources leaders. Organisations are increasingly looking to HR leaders to inform strategy, recognising that the alignment of people to processes and technology is crucial to success. For organisations across Asia-Pacific and Japan, changes in the role of HR are also being driven by more competitive talent acquisition and retention and heightened expectations from employees for investment in training, development and wellbeing. HR leaders are now stepping into the spotlight to lead and guide the rest of the company as they seek to move work forever forward by putting people at the heart of organisational strategy and decision-making.

Successful future forward HR leaders are proactive in their approach, looking to identify problems before they arise and develop strategies to navigate future challenges. These strategies are grounded in robust research and data, enabling them to advocate effectively for decisions that drive impact. It is by harnessing new technologies, like AI and embracing data-driven insights that future forward HR leaders are adding value to organisations and driving change in APAC and Japan.

Workday commissioned social research agency McCrindle to conduct this research to explore the evolving role of HR leaders in the APJ region. The insights in this report are based on a survey of 1,515 business leaders and HR professionals in large companies across the region, as well as three interviews with HR leaders who provided additional context and case studies for the insights uncovered in the research.

We thank the following HR leaders for their participation in the research:

**Dudi Arisandi,**

Chief People Officer at Tiket.com

**Kent Cabrera,**

General Manager Talent Enablement, Insights and Partnering at AIA Australia

**Jenny McKie,**

Chief People Officer at Hungry Jacks Australia



# Talent acquisition, training and retention are the top challenges facing organisations

Top three challenges facing business leaders and HR professionals across APJ



**36%**  
Talent acquisition



**35%**  
Employee upskilling



**31%**  
Staff retention

HR leaders are investing in talent development and mobility to navigate these challenges

**48%**

Investing in training and development to close the skills gap

**45%**

Implementing a skills-based strategy to create a more agile workforce

**43%**

Building HR managers' leadership capabilities to lead change

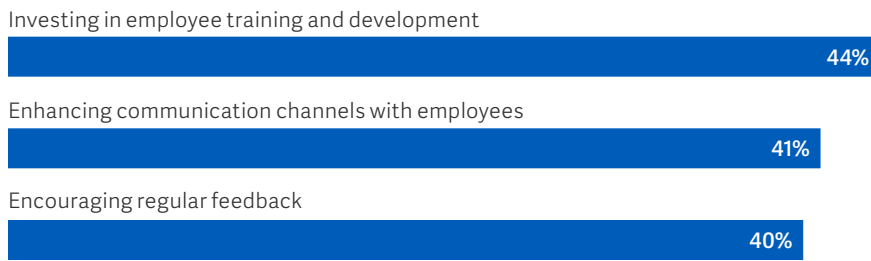
A human-centred approach is necessary to drive change

**89%**

of HR leaders who are driving change in their organisation are also seen as employee focused

## HR leaders are valuing employees by investing in training and enhancing communication

In order to prioritise the human aspect of human resources, organisations are:



## Organisations are recognising the value of HR in informing strategy

% strongly/somewhat agree



**73%**

HR leaders are adding strategic value to their organisation



**70%**

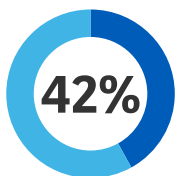
HR leaders are driving change in their organisation

## HR leaders are leveraging technology and data to allow their organisations to achieve business outcomes



**70%**

of senior managers and HR professionals are doing more data management now than before the global pandemic



More than two in five organisations are increasing their reliance on digital tools to streamline processes



## Leaders are taking a proactive approach to optimise the talent lifecycle

### Talent acquisition and retention are the priority.

Finding and retaining the right talent is top of mind for many organisations across APJ. In fact, talent acquisition (36%) is the top challenge experienced by business leaders and HR professionals in the region, while staff retention is in the top three (31%). In this competitive environment organisations are understandably prioritising training to ensure their performance remains high, but in a context of constant change, upskilling employees (35%) and training and development (31%) are also significant challenges.

To address these challenges, organisations should efficiently manage the entire talent lifecycle. This encompasses everything from initial workforce planning to sourcing, selection, onboarding, performance management, and succession planning, which ultimately drives employee retention. By gaining insights into their talent needs, organisations can identify not only mission-critical roles but also gaps in their current workforce. This empowers them to build a targeted talent acquisition strategy that aligns with their business goals.

### Top five challenges experienced by business leaders and HR professionals in APJ



### The importance of data in hiring

When it comes to hiring, data is an invaluable tool to ensure an organisation is selecting the right people.

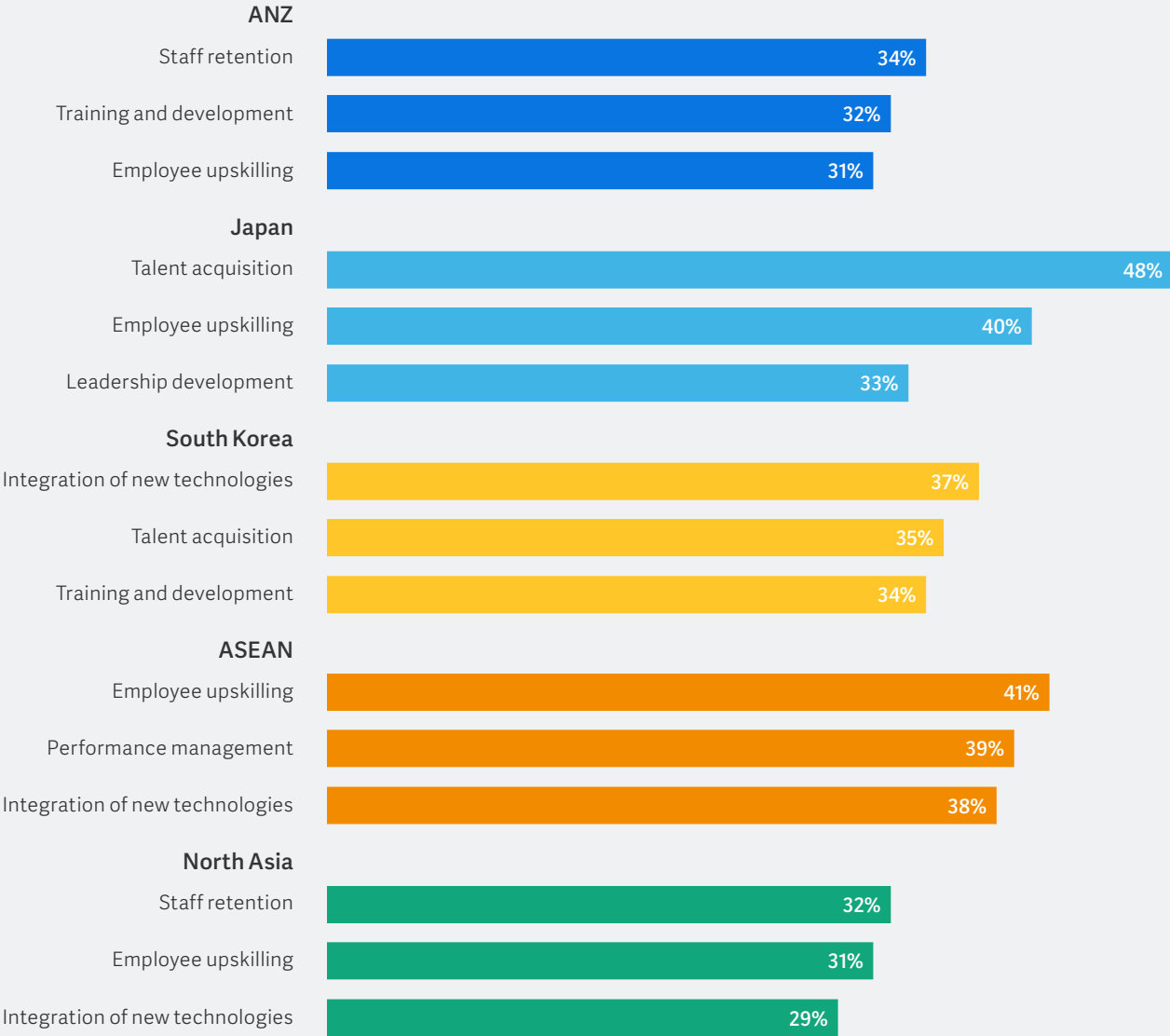
#### WORKDAY INSIGHT

AI is also helping HR leaders maximise hiring moments that matter, including candidate discovery and engagement. [Innovations in AI](#) enable HR to deliver proactive data-driven insights to the right candidates at the right time and at scale.

Similar challenges are experienced across the different regions within APJ, although there are some key differences. Talent acquisition is more of a challenge for business leaders in Japan (48%) than in other regions, and is also a top challenge in South Korea (35%). Business leaders in ANZ and North Asia are experiencing similar difficulties, both citing staff retention (34% and 32%, respectively) and employee upskilling (31%, 31%) as key challenges. The top challenge for business leaders in South Korea is integrating new technologies (37%), while leaders in the ASEAN region find employee upskilling (41%) and performance management (39%) most challenging.



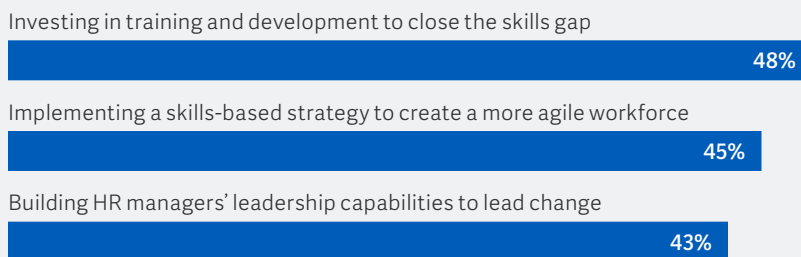
### Top 3 challenges in each region



## HR leaders are investing in talent development and mobility.

In response to these challenges, 48% of organisations are putting more emphasis on training and development to close the skills gap. Talent development is an effective strategy for responding to talent and retention challenges because it not only provides employees with necessary skills to perform well, but it can also encourage employee loyalty. Jenny McKie believes there could be a return to greater company loyalty for organisations that are investing in their employees, saying, “I can see that change coming back where there might be a little bit more loyalty when you come across a good thing in the future.”

### Key strategies organisations are using to navigate talent acquisition and retention challenges



#### WORKDAY INSIGHT

A powerful way of closing skills gaps is for leaders to **gain insights into the skills** that already exist within their organisation and the skills that are needed for future growth. Organisations need a trusted source of skills with a cohesive data model that includes a skills ontology, skill validation, the ability to import and export skills data, along with AI that leverages rich HR and transactional data.

#### Skills-based strategies must be holistic

“

We're thinking about the future capabilities needed based on the organisation's priorities and direction, then we do a gap analysis on current talent vs those capabilities.

**Kent Cabrera,**  
General Manager Talent Enablement, Insights and Partnering at AIA Australia.





## Proactive organisations are leveraging the multigenerational workforce.

In an era where people are living longer and working later, the workforce is becoming increasingly generationally diverse. It's important for business leaders and HR professionals to understand the values and perspectives each generation brings to harness the strengths and be aware of the potential challenges.

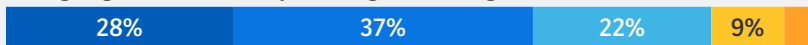
Organisations must be proactive in their efforts to attract workers from the emerging workforce, while retaining employees from older generations. Intergenerational unity is a priority for three in five leaders (63% strongly/somewhat agree), and 63% aim to ensure knowledge is effectively transferred between older and younger workers.

### To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the multigenerational workforce?

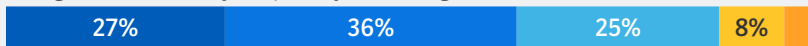
Our organisation is putting significant effort into attracting younger generations



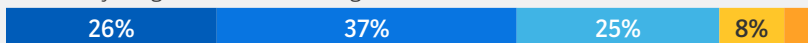
The ageing workforce is a key challenge for our organisation



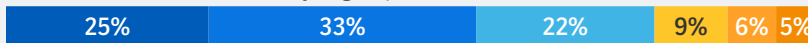
Intergenerational unity is a priority for our organisation



Knowledge is effectively transferred between older and younger workers in our organisation



Our organisation is putting significant effort into attracting talent from outside the country (e.g. expats)



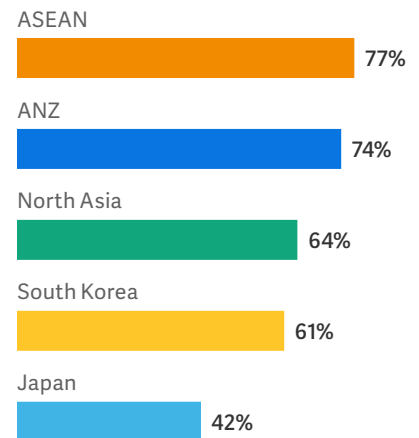
- Strongly agree    ● Somewhat agree    ● Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree    ● Somewhat disagree    ● Strongly disagree

#### WORKDAY INSIGHT

To understand the values and perspectives of each generation, organisations require an **intelligent listening platform** that gives them real-time employee sentiment, empowering them with actionable insights to provide the personalised employee experience that a diverse workforce requires.

#### ANZ & ASEAN HR leaders are most likely to believe knowledge is effectively transferred between older and younger workers in their organisation

% strongly/somewhat agree



## The importance of flexible working arrangements in attracting the emerging generation

Generation Z (born 1995 - 2009) already comprise 27% of the global workforce, and by 2035 Gen Z & Gen Alpha (born 2010 - 2024) are projected to comprise 50% of the global workforce. It's therefore imperative for business leaders to prioritise attracting and retaining this emerging generation of workers<sup>1</sup>.

Positively for organisations in APJ, seven in ten business leaders (72%) say they are putting significant effort into attracting younger generations. Business leaders and HR professionals believe the most attractive features in attracting the emerging workforce are flexible working hours (45%), career progression opportunities (43%) and learning and development opportunities (42%).

Employee expectations have evolved in the aftermath of the global pandemic with flexible working arrangements becoming more popular. Dudi Arisandi says "the new generation especially are very concerned with [hybrid working]. [Their mindset is] 'if it's not hybrid, I will not join'. So, we need to see this as a challenge for the region and workplace culture."

<sup>1</sup> United Nations 2023, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects 2022.

### WORKDAY INSIGHT

Providing mobile-first **employee experiences** is a great way to engage the younger generation at work. Employee self-service through intuitive mobile experiences allows organisations to meet workers where they are and connects workers with easy access to important information like their schedule, time-off, learning, HR support, and payslip.



### Top three most attractive features to the emerging workforce (Gen Z)



**45%**  
Flexible working hours



**43%**  
Career progression opportunities

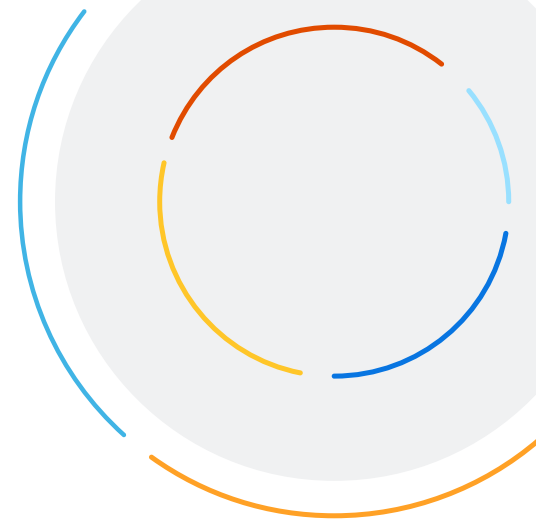


**42%**  
Learning and development opportunities

# The changing world of work is driving human centred talent strategies

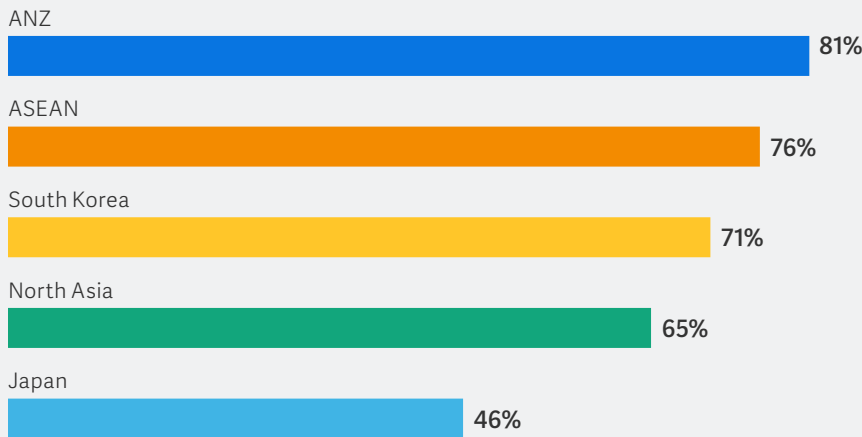
## Mental health is the top wellbeing challenge facing organisations.

Although employee wellbeing has always been a priority for organisations, 67% of business leaders and HR professionals are developing employee wellbeing programs more since the onset of the global pandemic. The top wellbeing challenges for organisations in APJ are mental health challenges (50%), stress due to overwork (48%) and feeling undervalued (38%).



## Organisations in ANZ and ASEAN are most likely to be developing employee wellbeing programs more since the pandemic

Developing employee wellbeing programs significantly/somewhat more:



The top wellbeing challenges commonly experienced by employees are:



**50%**  
Mental health challenges



**48%**  
Stress due to overwork



**38%**  
Feeling undervalued

## The employee experience is becoming increasingly reciprocal.

Organisations recognise the importance of employee wellbeing and are rethinking the employee experience to align with shifting expectations. HR leaders are uniquely positioned to understand the needs of employees and design solutions to enrich their experience. Almost nine in ten HR leaders (89%) who are driving change in their organisation are also seen as employee focused.

The main strategies organisations are employing to prioritise their employees are investing in training and development (44%), enhancing communication channels with employees (41%) and encouraging regular feedback (40%). It's important that organisations are not just gathering feedback from employees but are using this information to make better decisions.



We do culture surveys annually. We actively use that data to create our strategies. Whatever the feedback that's coming through around the expectations or what they'd like to see or how they're feeling, we look at how we can implement change in that.

**Jenny McKie,**  
Chief People Officer at  
Hungry Jacks Australia.

## With the rise of digital tools to manage HR functions, what measures is your organisation taking to prioritise the human aspect of human resources?

Please select all that apply.



### WORKDAY INSIGHT

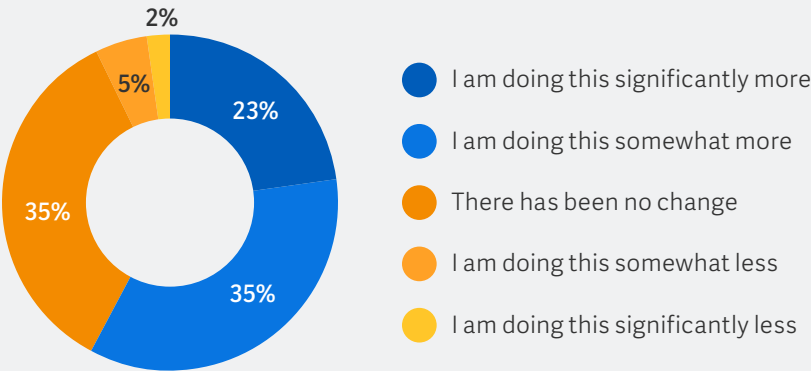
As organisations adapt to the rapidly changing needs and expectations of their employees, delivering a more meaningful employee experience has never been more vital than it is now. To deliver that type of experience, HR must have access to **intelligent tools** that can personalise the experience for every employee. With Workday, organisations can gain visibility into employee sentiment, use that feedback to take targeted action, and then measure the impact of each HR initiative on business goals and objectives.

# Future-forward HR leaders add strategic value to organisations

## HR leaders are strategic pillars.

Human resources is becoming an increasingly important voice informing organisational strategy as more and more companies recognise the importance of employee experience to company success. Staff satisfaction and wellbeing are key factors in improving productivity and loyalty among employees, in turn leading to better performance and less turnover.

### How has your participation in board meetings changed since the onset of the global pandemic?



For this reason, HR leaders are increasingly being invited to participate in conversations at an executive or board level. Almost three in five business leaders and HR professionals (58%) are participating in board meetings significantly or somewhat more since the pandemic. Not only this, but HR leaders are seen to be adding strategic value to their organisation (73%).

#### WORKDAY INSIGHT

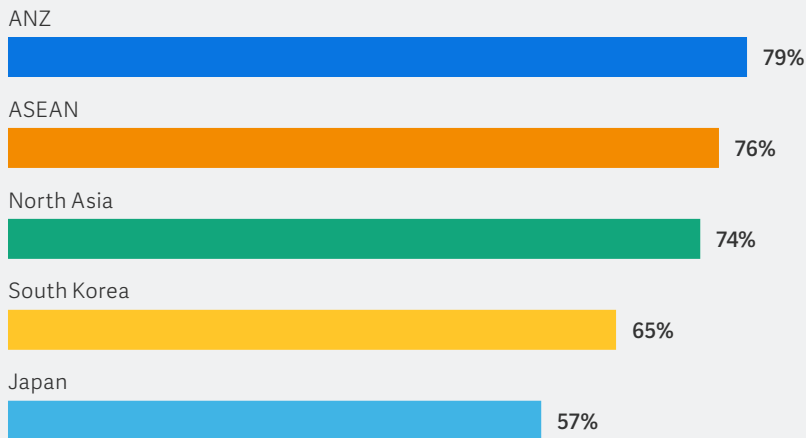
HR leaders also have a unique opportunity to influence and drive greater profitability for organisations by providing labour cost insights. Labour is often the highest expense for organisations. With access to real-time human capital data, HR leaders can create a global view of their **workforce costs and trends** to drive business decisions that maximise productivity and profitability.

### HR leaders are turning ideas into action.

Involving HR leaders in strategic level discussions is driving organisations to be more proactive in responding to employee needs. Seven in ten business leaders and HR professionals (71%) strongly or somewhat agree that HR leaders are driving change in their organisation. This is particularly the case when HR leaders are equipped with data and insights about employee experience and behaviour. Kent Cabrera is leading change by building HR capabilities, saying “I have a data and insights team that we’re using to try to help the business forecast things in a way that typical HR teams will be reporting retrospectively, we’re trying to be a bit more forward thinking with that”.

### To what extent do you agree or disagree HR leaders are driving change in your organisation?

Strongly/ somewhat agree:



### WORKDAY INSIGHT

Connected insights elevate HR from a transactional function to a strategic partner to the business. This starts with a **unified and flexible foundation** that not only brings your human capital data together in one view but also empowers HR with actionable insight across payroll, workforce management, and talent to drive greater productivity, growth, and transformation for the organisation.



## Data and technology are unlocking dynamic insights for informed decision-making

### Data-driven leaders are helping organisations to achieve business outcomes.

Business leaders and HR professionals are increasingly relying on data for informed decision making, with 70% of senior managers and HR professionals doing more data management now than before the global pandemic. According to Kent Cabrera, it is the ability of HR departments to collect and interpret that data that will set them up for success. He says, “if you’re not architecturally minded and future-state minded when you’re thinking about HR and the insights you want to give to a business, you’ll never put that into the design.”



# 70%

of senior managers and HR professionals are doing more data management now since the onset of the global pandemic.

#### WORKDAY INSIGHT

With access to so much data, it becomes difficult to focus on and prioritise what will help deliver the biggest impact. Therefore, organisations need **scalable technology solutions** that help them cut through the clutter with dynamic, prioritised insights. Workday connects applications in a unified data model and blends contextual, real-time, and multisource data with AI so organisations can manage their business with confidence.

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I believe HR is supposed to be more data-driven, more proactive, to understand the business better.

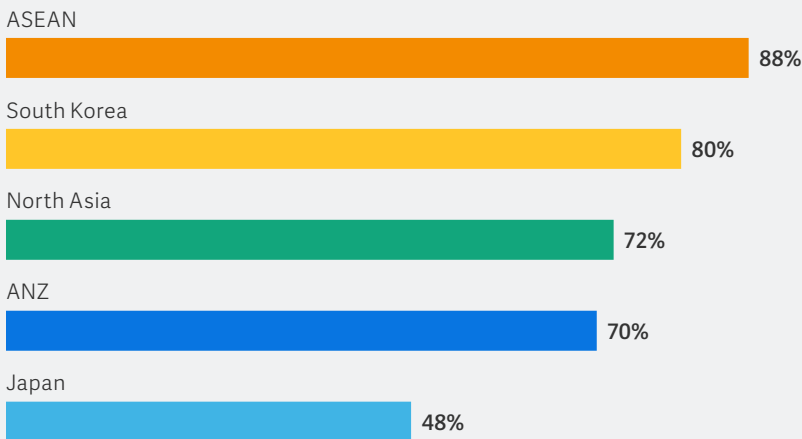
**Dudi Arisandi,**  
Chief People Officer at Tiket.com.

## AI is streamlining HR functions

HR departments are looking to simplify processes and “do more with less.” More than two in five organisations (42%) are increasing their reliance on digital tools to streamline processes and cut out repetitive tasks. Seven in ten organisations (69%) are using artificial intelligence and/or machine learning for HR functions. This is most common in ASEAN (88%) and South Korea (80%), while less than half of organisations in Japan (48%) are currently using these technologies for HR functions. Most business leaders and HR professionals (91%) believe AI and ML have positively impacted HR functions within their organisation.

Organisations are most likely to leverage AI and ML for analytics and reporting (49%), workforce management (45%) and performance management (44%).

### Percentage of organisations using AI and/or ML to manage HR functions by region:



#### WORKDAY INSIGHT

AI is a key tool for organisations to innovate faster, save money, and empower their people to do more strategic work. To Workday, the purpose of **artificial intelligence** and machine learning is to augment human decision making, not to replace it. Workday’s commitment is to use AI to provide workers with insights, predictions, and recommendations to help them be better versions of themselves, making them more productive and enabling them to focus on more strategic-oriented work. Organisations that use AI responsibly unlock a sustainable competitive advantage in an ever-evolving AI landscape.

## In which of the following HR functions and practices is your organisation using artificial intelligence and/or machine learning?

Please select all that apply.



**49%**  
Analytics and reporting



**45%**  
Workforce management  
(e.g. time tracking/  
scheduling)



**44%**  
Performance management



**43%**  
Employee records management



**42%**  
HR support or service desks



## Top five action steps for leaders

- 1 Utilise the expertise of HR leaders in strategic conversations**

Employee success is central to company success. By involving HR leaders in strategic conversations, organisations can leverage their insights to enhance employee experience, maximise productivity and optimise the talent lifecycle.

This collaboration also allows HR leaders to better understand the organisation and its goals and align their strategies appropriately.
- 2 Develop a human centred strategy which prioritises employees**

Ensure two-way communication with employees by utilising tools such as regular surveys to hear feedback on workplace satisfaction and areas for improvement.

Incorporate the learnings from employee feedback into the organisation's goals to address current challenges and improve employee satisfaction.
- 3 Design strategies that will future-proof your workforce**

In this changing world of work, it's important for organisations to take a proactive approach to future-proof their workforce.

Identify skills gaps and use targeted acquisition strategies, as well as training and development, to build a competitive and agile workforce.
- 4 Utilise technology and data to uncover meaningful insights and simplify processes**

Gathering and analysing data enables HR leaders to make informed, measurable decisions to achieve business outcomes. It also allows leaders to understand trends earlier and take proactive steps to address current challenges and anticipate future ones.

By integrating AI technology, HR processes can be streamlined, and repetitive tasks automated.
- 5 Leverage the multi-generational workforce**

Understand the value and differing perspectives offered by each generation to harness strengths and be aware of challenges.

Design recruitment strategies which appeal to younger generations of workers, highlighting opportunities for flexibility and career growth.

### WORKDAY INSIGHT

Workday is a leading enterprise platform that helps organisations manage their most important assets – their people and money. The Workday platform is built with AI at the core to help customers elevate people, supercharge work, and move their business forever forward. Workday is used by more than 10,500 organisations around the world and across industries – from medium-sized businesses to more than 60% of the Fortune 500.

For more information about Workday, visit [workday.com](https://www.workday.com).

# Research methodology

This report is the collation of findings from an online survey of senior managers and HR professionals across Asia-Pacific and Japan, and in-depth interviews with three Chief Human Resource Officers from Workday’s network. Throughout the report, respondents are referred to as either ‘business leaders and HR professionals’, ‘business leaders’, or simply ‘leaders’.

## In-depth interviews

A series of in-depth interviews were conducted with three Chief Human Resource Officers between April 29<sup>th</sup> and May 20<sup>th</sup> 2024.

## Online survey

The online survey was completed by senior managers and HR professionals working in companies with 300 employees or more. The survey was in field from the 26<sup>th</sup> of March to the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 2024, yielding n=1,515 completed responses.

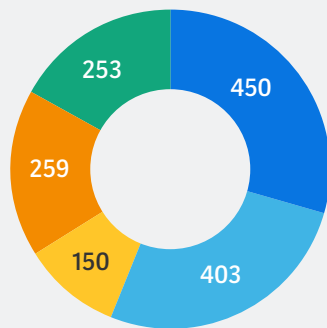
## Graphs and rounding

Data labels on the graphs in this report have been rounded for simplicity. Some graphs, may, therefore sum to 99% or 101%. Any calculations where two data points have been added are based on raw data (not the rounded data labels on the graph) which have been rounded once combined.

## Respondent characteristics

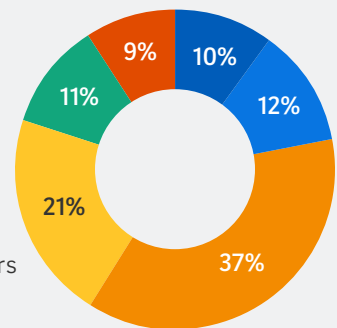
### Regions

- ANZ
- Japan
- South Korea
- ASEAN (Singapore 101, Malaysia 48, Thailand 50, Indonesia 60)
- North Asia (Hong Kong 151, Taiwan 102)



### Role in organisation

- HR Officers
- Senior HR professionals
- Senior managers
- Executive managers
- Directors
- C-level executives



### Gender



# About McCrindle

McCrindle is an independent social research agency that has been studying social and demographic trends for nearly two decades. McCrindle provides a range of research and advisory services to help business leaders understand the latest consumer and workforce trends and communicate insights to equip leaders with confidence to lead in changing times.





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