



High-velocity talent strategies for a changing world

What to stop, start, and scale in an AI-powered, fast-shifting future

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Executive summary

Work is evolving faster than most talent models can keep up. AI, automation, and shifting employee expectations are reshaping how organisations attract, develop, and retain people. Traditional approaches—designed for predictability—are falling short in a world defined by disruption.

High-velocity talent strategies—built for adaptability, resilience, and continuous learning—are quickly becoming non-negotiable. The organisations that thrive won't just fill roles. They'll create ecosystems where people can stretch, grow, and stay relevant.

Today, trust, fairness, and career agency aren't nice-to-haves—they're make-or-break. In the age of AI, helping employees stay skilled means helping them stay employed. And that requires rethinking not just how we manage talent, but how we design work itself.

Reality check: The best organisations don't just manage talent—they architect environments where it thrives.



Call to action

- **Pressure-test your strategy:** Is it built for adaptability and trust—or stuck in yesterday's model?
- **Start the right conversation:** How will you balance AI, profitability, and workforce engagement—without trading off one for the other?

Introduction

The world of work has outpaced the systems designed to manage it.

It's a conversation we've been having for years: traditional talent models—fixed roles, linear career paths, and hierarchical structures built for predictability and control—no longer fit today's reality. For a long time, they provided structure. But in an era of nonstop disruption, they're doing more than falling short. They're holding companies back.

What people want from work has changed. What organisations need has too.

For talent and learning leaders, this isn't just a structural challenge—it's deeply human. Expectations around career growth, flexibility, and purpose have shifted. Skills expire faster than they can be replaced. Teams form and evolve around work—not job titles. And after years of transformation, change fatigue is real.

Yet the demand to evolve hasn't slowed. The World Economic Forum projects that 1.1 billion jobs will be reshaped by technology in the next decade. At the same time, 93% of employers say today's graduates aren't ready for an AI-powered workplace.

That's why leading companies are adopting high-velocity talent strategies—approaches built for adaptability, speed, and continuous reinvention. These strategies shift the focus from rigid roles to fluid capabilities, from career ladders to career ecosystems, from planning for stability to preparing for change.

Through global market analysis, executive interviews, and work across industries, we surfaced what's working, what's breaking down, and where the biggest points of leverage lie.



The future of work: AI, automation & workforce reinvention

In most organisations today, disruption is being driven not just by external forces but by the transformation of work itself. AI, automation, and evolving employee expectations are redefining how work gets done, how teams are structured, and what organisations need from their people.

What's becoming clear

- **AI and automation are restructuring workflows.** AI is reshaping decision-making, collaboration, and value creation. The opportunity isn't replacement—it's augmentation: combining machine efficiency with human strengths like empathy, creativity, and judgment.
- **Rigid job structures are giving way to skills-based models**
Titles are no longer the best signal of value. What matters is what people can do—and how quickly they can learn what's next. Skills-based approaches are moving from theory to operating model.
- **Unlocking internal talent is now a strategic advantage**
Internal mobility, talent marketplaces, and cross-functional deployment help meet business needs in real time. Organisations are shifting focus from credentials to potential.

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How talent leaders need to adjust

You don't need more frameworks. You need moves that matter. The question isn't if you should evolve—it's where to place bets.

Focus here:

- **Redesign work with augmentation in mind**
AI should take on the repeatable.
People should do what only humans can—lead, empathize, create.

- **Don't manage roles—mobilize capabilities**
Agile talent strategy starts with shedding static structures. Capabilities unlock growth, stretch, and adaptability.
- **Rethink how you deploy talent**
Internal talent is too often overlooked. Future-ready orgs are shifting from hiring externally to activating what's already inside.



HR is no longer a function—it's a boundaryless discipline

As the boundaries of HR expand, so does its responsibility—not just for programs, but for the systems that shape how power is distributed, how people grow, and how decisions get made.

In this context, trust isn't a soft skill—it's a structural asset. And it's increasingly the difference between a workforce that resists change and one that's ready for it.

That's why the first shift we explore is foundational:

Trend 1: Trust, power & equity

The next talent advantage isn't a system—it's a shift in how the system works.

In a world of accelerating change, trust has become the glue that holds organisations together. Not the inspirational kind found in culture decks—but the operational kind that shapes decisions, systems, and the everyday experience of work. Trust is now a competitive advantage: Mercer's *Talent Trends 2024* found employees' trust is the strongest factor shaping their energy, sense of thriving, and intent to stay.

According to Mercer:

- Only 69% of employees trust their employer to do the right thing—down from 80% during the pandemic
- 45% of HR leaders rate their culture as low trust
- 82% of employees don't trust their manager to tell the truth

Additionally, research by ServiceNow revealed that:

- Over 50% of employees trust AI more than a human HR professional
- Employees aren't just questioning leadership—they're questioning the fairness of the system itself.

Where trust breaks down

- **Fairness and transparency**

Many organisations are still running on outdated talent routines. When decision-making isn't visible or feels biased, people disengage—regardless of intent.

- **Credibility of decision-makers**

Succession often favors familiarity over readiness. Data is ignored in favor of instinct. Until talent decisions reflect equity and objectivity, trust remains fragile.

- **Technology misalignment**

Flashy candidate experiences and opaque AI assessments can feel more like performance than progress. When tech lacks transparency, it erodes confidence.

Where trust lives in high-performing organizations

The most forward-looking organizations don't treat trust as a message or a moment. They know trust is earned through experience—how people are promoted, supported, heard, and held accountable.

They go beyond intent and symbolism. They redesign how decisions are made, how power is shared, and how fairness shows up in the everyday systems of work.

What sets them apart isn't values—it's execution. They make trust structural, not situational. It's built into processes, not left to perception.

Here's what that looks like in practice:

- Building credibility into systems, not just culture
- Creating visible pathways for voice and career agency
- Using tech to promote fairness—not obscure it

The upside of getting it right

- More energy and engagement
- Stronger retention and loyalty
- Faster change adoption
- A sharper, more credible talent brand



So how do you move from trust as a principle to trust as a lived experience? It starts with structure. The table below outlines four essential levers organizations are using to embed trust at scale—through leadership behaviors, talent practices, and system design.

Where trust takes shape: the 4 levers

TRUST PRINCIPLE	WHY IT MATTERS	WHAT IT REQUIRES
1. Psychological safety	People must feel safe to speak up and take risks	Open communication, feedback culture, and leadership modeling of respect and responsiveness
2. Empowered people leaders	Managers shape the day-to-day trust experience	Coaching, tools, and autonomy to lead with empathy and accountability
3. Embedded DEI	Belonging drives credibility and inclusion	Clear DEI strategy, inclusive practices across the lifecycle, and real consequences for inequity
4. Fair, transparent talent practices	People trust what they can see and understand	Data-driven decisions, equitable promotions, and clarity on what great looks like—and how it's assessed



Three ways to build trust through talent strategy

Trust isn't just a value or a system—it's the connective tissue between people, processes, and the organization itself. It's what allows employees to engage fully, take risks, and grow—because they believe the system around them will meet them with clarity, fairness, and follow-through.

That's also what makes it hard to build. Many organizations try to earn trust through communication or intent. But people don't trust language—they trust experiences. And one of the most powerful places those experiences are formed is in talent systems: how growth happens, how performance is judged, and how leadership potential is recognized.

When these systems are designed well, they reinforce a sense of belonging and direction. They signal: we see you, we grow with you, and we make decisions you can understand—even if you don't always agree with them.

Here are three tools that help reinforce trust in action:

1. **Success profiles**

Clear, future-focused models of leadership that align stakeholders and define what's needed to succeed—now and next.

2. **High-fidelity simulations**

Realistic, experiential environments where leaders can test-drive decisions and receive expert feedback in real time.

3. **Objective assessments**

Multiple data points and actionable feedback aligned to business outcomes—helping both the organisation and the individual move forward with confidence.

What does this look like for real companies? The following example shows what happens when leadership development becomes a proving ground for trust:

Case study

A global design, engineering, and advisory firm needed a pipeline of succession-ready leaders equipped for a fast-changing business environment. Together with BTS, they built a multi-part experience:

- Success profiles aligned to the growth strategy
- High-fidelity simulations and role plays for skill demonstration
- Objective assessments for readiness and development
- Real-time, whole-person feedback to support future planning

Outcomes:

+20.4% increase in promotion rate for high potentials

6 successors identified for key leadership roles

Satisfaction score of **8.68/10**

What made this work wasn't just the content—it was the consistency. Every element reinforced the same message: *you're being seen, supported, and evaluated with care.*

That's what high-trust systems do. They remove the guesswork, reduce the noise, and help people lean in—because they believe the process will meet them with both rigor and respect.

But trust on its own doesn't drive performance. It creates the conditions for something deeper: **sustained energy, real growth, and a sense of purpose that lasts.**

That's where many organizations fall short. People are burned out, stretched thin, and quietly questioning whether the system is built to support them—or simply extract from them.

The organizations that will lead the next era aren't just building trust—they're **protecting human capacity as a strategic asset.**

That brings us to the next shift:

Trend 2:

Human sustainability as a competitive advantage

Work shouldn't drain people—it should help them thrive.

Today's performance models can't rely on burnout masked as productivity. Human sustainability is emerging as a defining capability for organisations that want to compete long-term—ensuring that employees thrive professionally and personally.

Three pillars shaping future-fit strategies

1

Health and well-being

Focus on the whole person—physical, mental, financial, and social health—not just output.

3

Purpose and meaning

Help people connect their work to something that matters. When people find meaning, performance follows.

2

Growth and long-term employability

Equip people with skills for what's next—inside and beyond your organisations.

What it unlocks

- Better business outcomes: improved financial performance, innovation, and reduced risk
- Better human outcomes: greater well-being, engagement, and loyalty

The infrastructure of a sustainable workforce

Principle	Why it Matters	What it Requires
Mindset shift	Sustainable organisations create value for people, not just extract productivity	Reframing people as value creators, not costs
Leadership commitment	Leaders shape culture. If they don't walk the talk, nothing changes	Visible, active support from the board, C-suite, and every people leader
Employee involvement	Co-creation drives commitment	Give employees a role in shaping initiatives, priorities, and implementation
Manager enablement	Managers are the front line of daily experience	Provide tools, training, and space to balance performance and well-being

The new language of talent strategy

Talent strategy used to revolve around three choices:

Build from within. **Buy** from outside. **Borrow** when needed.

It was a simple, stable framework for a simpler, more stable world. But work has changed—and so have the questions leaders need to ask.

Today, the challenge isn't just how to fill roles. It's how to move fast without breaking trust. How to stay flexible *and* fair. How to design teams that adapt in real time—across functions, formats, and even technologies.

That's why many organisations are moving beyond the original model, expanding to a broader set of talent moves that reflect the complexity of today's workplace.

We call them the **9Bs**—a practical, adaptable language for making smarter decisions about how work gets done.

It starts with six foundational moves:

1. **Build:** Develop internal talent through reskilling and upskilling
Example: Launch a digital learning academy to close capability gaps.

4. **Bind:** Retain key talent through growth, purpose, and alignment
Example: Create personalized career paths for high-potential employees.

2. **Buy:** Hire externally to fill strategic roles
Example: Recruit a data scientist from the market to accelerate innovation.

5. **Bounce:** Exit roles or individuals that no longer fit
Example: Manage exits respectfully as part of a larger org redesign.

3. **Borrow:** Temporarily bring in outside expertise
Example: Engage a consultant to lead a short-term transformation effort.

6. **Bot:** Automate repeatable tasks with technology
Example: Use AI chatbots to streamline employee service requests.

And three newer moves are gaining traction:

1. **Bridge:** Support people through transitions like redeployment or retirement
Example: Offer outplacement services or phased retirement planning.

3. **Boost:** Stretch emerging leaders in high-stakes, real-world roles
Example: Assign high potentials to lead major cross-functional projects.

2. **Blend:** Combine different types of talent into one cohesive team
Example: Use a hybrid team of full-time staff, freelancers, and automation for a product launch.

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The power of this model?

It gives leaders a shared way to talk about talent moves—one that's dynamic, human-centered, and built for change. The 9Bs don't replace strategy—they make it real, fast.

The evolving division of work

As machines take on more repeatable tasks, two complementary skill sets now separate thriving companies from struggling ones. The goal isn't to replace people—it's to rethink how work gets done.

AI delivers speed, scale, and consistency. It analyzes data, automates workflows, and recommends next steps in real time. But it can't bring what humans do best: context, judgment, empathy, ethics, and creative problem-solving.

The most future-ready organisations are rethinking roles with that in mind—automating what can be automated and investing in human capabilities that truly differentiate. When used well, AI doesn't replace human value. It amplifies it.

The 3 tables that follow offer a practical lens on that evolving division—and how to design talent strategies that bring out the best of both.

What humans do best

Storytelling

Turning complexity into meaning—helping others believe, decide, and act through narrative.

Collaboration and co-creation

Building trust, navigating difference, and solving problems with others.

Leadership

Inspiring action through belief, empathy, and decisive judgment in uncertainty.

Contextual judgment

Reading the room and making smart calls—factoring in nuance, timing, and impact.

Creative synthesis

Connecting unexpected dots to invent new ideas—powered by intuition and insight.

Ethical and inclusive decision-making

Prioritizing fairness and long-term impact—especially when the rules are unclear.

Emotional and social intelligence

Tuning into people, adapting in real time, and building trust through presence.

Resilience and adaptability

Staying steady and responsive through change—with self-awareness and flexibility.

Technical / specialist skills required for an AI-augmented environment

AI literacy

Understanding how AI systems work, where they add value, and how to use them responsibly.

Data literacy

Reading, interpreting, and questioning data—drawing insights that support smart, ethical, evidence-based decisions.

Digital fluency

Navigating digital tools, platforms, and workflows with confidence—and adapting as technologies evolve.

What AI excels at

Processing large datasets at speed

Uncovering patterns, trends, and anomalies in seconds—not hours.

Automating repeatable tasks

Taking on routine work to boost efficiency and reduce human error.

Scaling logic-based decisions consistently

Applying logic to thousands of scenarios without fatigue or bias drift.

Recommending next-best actions

Using predictive models to guide decisions based on past performance.

Operating 24/7 without fatigue

Delivering always-on service with perfect memory and no emotional fluctuation.

Where to place your talent bets in 2025

The future of work isn't arriving someday—it's taking shape now. For talent leaders, the question isn't whether to respond, but how to focus. The most effective organisations aren't chasing every trend—they're making a few bold moves with outsized impacts.

Here are three we see reshaping the field:

1

Leverage AI to enhance leadership development

AI isn't replacing leaders—it's making them better. Organisations are beginning to use tools like predictive analytics and simulation-based learning to build decision-making muscle in real time. By combining data with dynamic feedback, leaders build the confidence, agility, and foresight needed for complexity.

2

Build employability in the flow of work

In an AI-augmented world, employability is the new currency. The organisations getting this right are embedding upskilling into day-to-day work—not separating learning from doing. And they're using tools like Verity, BTS's AI-powered coach, to make it scalable and personal.

Verity helps leaders reflect on behaviours, receive timely nudges, and improve over time—all in the flow of their actual work. This kind of integrated development ensures employees stay relevant—even when their roles are evolving or under threat from automation. It's not about replacing jobs. It's about reskilling at the speed of change.

3

Redesign leadership development for today's reality

Leadership doesn't happen in a vacuum—it happens in context. That's why more companies are moving beyond traditional programs to create real-world, cross-functional learning experiences. They're helping leaders lead in the moment—navigating change, building trust, and making human-centered decisions at speed.

The companies that act now—thoughtfully, strategically—will define what leadership and talent excellence looks like in 2025. At BTS, we're helping organisations make that shift real: through [leadership development](#), [AI-enhanced tools like Verity](#), [assessment](#), and workforce planning.

The future won't wait. But it will reward those ready to lead. What's your next move?

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