

# Forward Look 2025

Key themes from the podcast series



# Introduction

Businesses in 2025 are operating in an environment characterized by significant geopolitical, economic, and technological disruptions. Ongoing trade disputes between major economies, including the United States and China, are contributing to supply chain instability and market volatility. Protectionist policies and shifting regulatory frameworks are prompting businesses to reassess global workforce strategies and talent mobility. Meanwhile, rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) are not only transforming business operations but also raising questions about the ethical use of automation, cybersecurity risks, and the evolving role of human workers. The rise of AI, automation, and digitalization necessitates new workforce strategies, while demographic shifts, such as aging populations in key markets, are exacerbating competition for skilled talent.

Further fueling debate, Nvidia's CEO, Jensen Huang, recently suggested that IT departments may soon assume responsibility for certain HR-related activities associated with AI agents. His remarks sparked widespread discussion about the division of responsibility between HR and IT across all aspects of the employment lifecycle, from recruitment and onboarding to training, performance management, and exit. While experts highlight HR's responsibility in these areas, and for workforce planning, cultural development and human-machine team work, the conversation has been valuable in exploring how businesses must rethink the intersection of technology and workforce strategy.

Against this backdrop, our **Forward Look 2025** podcast series sought insights from leading HR thought leaders, including Professors Anthony Nyberg, Emma Parry, and Craig Crossley, as well as CHROs Raj Kaur and Beth Whittaker, to explore what lies ahead for the HR function. Here we extract the key themes from those discussions, highlighting the strategic priorities that CHROs must address to drive sustainable organizational success.



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## Key Takeaways for CHROs

- **AI and HR:** AI will not replace HR but augment its role, streamlining operations while allowing CHROs to lead workforce planning efforts and subsequent capability strategy to help close skill gaps across the organization. This necessitates collaboration between senior HR leaders and key stakeholders across the organization, scenario planning and reconsideration of organization design and resourcing.
- **Strategic talent management:** Organizations must focus on skills-based hiring, skill-based development, internal mobility, and AI-driven workforce analytics to close skill gaps.
- **The aging workforce:** Retaining and leveraging an aging workforce will be key, requiring new practices around flexible work, retirement planning, and knowledge transfer.
- **Agile and remote work models:** Hybrid, remote and flexible work arrangements remain critical for talent attraction and retention, necessitating a strong organizational culture.
- **HR as a strategic business partner:** The most effective CHROs will deeply understand business strategy, enabling HR to drive competitive advantage.
- **ESG and DEE&I considerations:** While DEE&I faces scrutiny in some regions, forward-thinking organizations recognize its role in fostering innovation and long-term performance. Additionally, ESG encompasses broader aspects such as sustainability, employee wellbeing, and governance, which are critical business priorities.

# Forward Look 2025 themes

## What makes a great CHRO in 2025

Anthony Nyberg emphasized that CHROs are one of the three most important roles in any organization, alongside CEOs and CFOs. The modern CHRO must not only oversee HR functions but also actively contribute to strategic business decisions. Craig Crossley reinforced this, highlighting that CHROs must cultivate an adaptive learning culture to ensure their organizations remain resilient amid disruption.

Emma Parry stressed the need for CHROs to ensure the implementation of personalized learning pathways for employees, ensuring that development programs are aligned with emerging business needs. Beth Whittaker added that CHROs must be proactive in identifying skills gaps and implementing long-term workforce strategies to sustain competitive advantage.

## The impact of AI on HR and the role of the CHRO

Raj Kaur emphasized that AI adoption must be framed as an augmentation of human capability rather than a replacement for human workers. She cautioned against AI-induced job displacement and urged CHROs to lead reskilling initiatives.

Beth Whittaker highlighted how Veolia's use of AI in HR has significantly improved efficiency, reducing service response times by 50% and expediting key HR processes such as onboarding and employee inquiries. This data-driven approach has enhanced employee experience and positioned HR as a strategic enabler of business success.

Craig Crossley highlighted that AI-driven analytics can be a game-changer in workforce planning by enabling predictive modeling to forecast talent needs, identify skill shortages, and optimize workforce allocation. However, he also emphasized that organizations must shift their perspective from cost-cutting to viewing HR analytics as a long-term investment. AI must be leveraged responsibly, ensuring that ethical considerations such as bias mitigation and data privacy are prioritized.



### Michelle Stansfield

Michelle is Head of Content at Senovis. She spent 10 years at PwC, specializing in people risk management, innovation and reward. Her work has spanned the media and digital sectors, financial services, manufacturing and the public sector, bringing value to clients in the fields of talent management, workforce planning, wellbeing, DE&I and reward. Subsequently she spent 15 years leading large-scale people-related transformations for some of the world's largest employers. Michelle has had work published in Accountancy Age, The MJ, and in a range of HR and Occupational Health publications, on the topics of innovation, motivation, reward and wellbeing.

"The primary issue by far that we hear that distinguishes a good from a great CHRO is a CHRO that fully understands how the business is competing in the marketplace."



### Anthony Nyberg

Anthony is a Professor of Management, and Director at the Centre for Executive Succession, Darla Moore School of Business, at the University of South Carolina. He has a particular interest in C-suite succession, compensation and performance management. During his time in academia, Anthony's work has been published in the likes of Harvard Business review and Time magazine, he has worked for top academic journals and has also spent a number of years as a partner of an international financial services firm.

## Skills challenges and strategic resourcing

Michelle Stansfield noted that the World Economic Forum has predicted a dramatic shift in job availability, with millions of jobs being created and displaced, but overall a net increase in job types. This sparked a conversation about addressing skills shortages via a range of practices, from structured reskilling programs to new operating models and organizational structures that allow organizations to utilize their skills in more efficient and effective ways.

Emma Parry highlighted that organizations should not rely solely on external hiring but should prioritize internal mobility and skills development. She underscored the importance of personalized learning pathways, a theme echoed by Craig Crossley, who argued that fostering an adaptive learning culture is essential for long-term business resilience.

## Managing an aging workforce

Michelle Stansfield highlighted that over 20% of the UK population is over 65, and that it is therefore becoming increasingly difficult for organizations to find the quantity of skills they need out in the market, because there is a smaller pool of talent to draw on, and organizations must find ways to retain and leverage the skills of older employees.

Beth Whittaker shared Veolia's efforts in creating structured mentoring programs and flexible work arrangements to accommodate older employees, while Craig Crossley reinforced the importance of knowledge transfer initiatives. Emma Parry noted that organizations should not only focus on younger talent but also ensure that older employees are included in upskilling and career development programs.

"We hear all the time about Google, Amazon, Microsoft, Walmart, Workday, Johnson & Johnson. They're helping inform employees of career paths, which helps with retention. They're identifying talent gaps and then providing some self-driven opportunities for people to develop the skills they need to progress in a direction they'd like."



**Craig Crossley**

Craig is an Associate Professor of Management at the University of Central Florida. He has a particular interest in leadership, trust and ethics. During his time in academia, Craig's work has been published in top academic journals and recognized in Fortune magazine. He worked for a Top 100 private company where he specialized in consumer insights and analytics. He has also supported SME's with the globalization process and is passionate about building organizational performance and applying HR research.

"65% of the queries that come in are solved and resolved through the chatbot, without the need for any further escalation."



**Beth Whittaker**

Beth Whittaker is the Chief Human Resources Officer at Veolia, Northern Europe, a position she has held since 2019, having worked her way up from a HR apprenticeship which she began 25 years ago. Beth has led on important initiatives such as Respect at Work and has driven Veolia's HR strategy focusing on aligning people with purpose to unlock exceptional business performance. More recently, Beth has led her team to launch a 50+ talent campaign to attract and retain people with crucial skills and experience and adopt AI with a significant improvement to HR workflows and response times.

**Over 20% of the UK population is over the age of 65**

World Economic Forum, 2025

**87% of CHROs are evaluating new ways to deliver HR value at lower cost**

PwC 2024

## Agile working

Remote and hybrid work models remain a dominant trend. Raj Kaur noted that maintaining engagement and productivity in a flexible workforce requires a shift in performance management strategies. She emphasized that organizations must strike a balance between flexibility and maintaining a strong corporate culture.

Beth Whittaker shared Veolia's experience in implementing flexible work policies that cater to employees across various life stages. Emma Parry added that organizations should rethink traditional job structures to embrace more project-based and skills-focused work models.

## ESG strategy

ESG factors are increasingly becoming a priority for HR leaders. Beth Whittaker highlighted Veolia's commitment to green skills and sustainability initiatives, recognizing that HR must take an active role in driving ESG strategies.

Emma Parry emphasized that organizations with strong DE&I initiatives tend to perform better over the long term. While some regions face growing scrutiny over DE&I, she stressed that businesses must remain committed to fostering inclusive workplaces. Additionally, ESG considerations extend beyond DE&I, encompassing environmental sustainability, corporate governance, and employee wellbeing, all of which were key themes in this podcast series.

"We've got a hybrid way of working at the moment and it's leader led, we work on the principle that we have three days together and two wherever."



### Raj Kaur

Raj Kaur is the Chief People Officer at LRQA, a role she has held for nearly 3 years. With extensive experience in human resources, Raj has previously held various HR leadership roles at Lloyds Register, Boots and Citi. Raj is known for her strategic planning, talent management and organizational development skills. She holds a Masters degree in Human Resource Management and is a Chartered member of the CIPD. Her expertise spans multiple industry sectors, including financial services, retail and energy.

"There are challenges about how we manage teams that are part machine, part human. That's really becoming a reality. We tend to focus on the technology in these things and not the humans. How do we motivate humans to actually work in that way?"



### Emma Parry

Emma is Professor of Human Resource Management and Head of the Changing World of work group at Cranfield school of management. She is also Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of Human Resource Management. She has a particular interest in the influence of technological advancement on the workplace, as well as cultural and age differences in attitudes towards careers. She has also undertaken a large number of research projects in relation to human capability within defense.

**Two of the biggest skill gaps over the next 5 years will be in environmental stewardship and curiosity and lifelong learning**

World Economic Forum, 2025

**35% of CHROs see the environmental domain of ESG as a minor responsibility, or not one of their responsibilities at all**

Darla Moore School of Business, 2023

# Three questions for CHROs to consider

01. How can we harness AI to enhance—not replace—human potential in our organization?

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02. Are we effectively preparing our workforce for the skills and competencies required in 2025 and beyond?

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03. How do we balance flexibility, inclusivity, and business needs in a rapidly evolving work environment?

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The **Forward Look 2025** series has provided invaluable insights into the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for CHROs. As we move into the future, those who embrace adaptability, data-driven strategy, and human-centric leadership will be best positioned to drive organizational success.

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