



The Next AI Challenges: Agent Workforces, Entry-Level Pipelines, and CEO Digital Twins



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Across two recent in-person M1 meetings, CHROs discussed new concerns they face as AI use explodes, from what to do about entry-level jobs to how eliminating routine tasks will lead to higher cognitive loads on your workers.

Artificial intelligence dominated the discussions at recent M1 meetings hosted by IBM CHRO Nickle LaMoreaux in New York and by Hae In Kim, the CHRO of Hyundai Motor, at the offices of their subsidiary Boston Dynamics in Boston in late May. The conversations took over other parts of the agenda and sparked animated exchanges about where AI is headed as CHROs continue to navigate the risks and opportunities of technological disruption.

The discussions were a reminder of how varied and complex the challenges are that CHROs face when it comes to AI. Past meetings have focused on the size and shape of their HR teams, how their organizations are governing AI implementation, and what they're doing to increase adoption. But while those topics all came up, other challenges were raised, from the impact of AI on entry-level jobs to what they think about CEO avatars and what automation will do to workers' cognitive load.

Below, we've pulled together the most thoughtful insights and recurring themes from the two meetings—which also focused on other topics, such as succession planning, robotics, and the future of the CHRO role. We'll dive into those in future updates, but for now, if we can help make connections based on the information below, please let us know.

The Entry-Level Paradox: Protecting Tomorrow's Pipeline

AT A GLANCE:

- The consequences of AI automation on entry-level roles could be stark, leading to a hollowed talent pipeline without careful thinking about redesigned roles.
- CHROs need to be Chief Utilization Officers, being specific about how workers spend the time that's freed up from AI automation.
- At the same time, the expectation that workers can do higher-value work 100% of the time is unsustainable and must be accounted for when structuring roles.

The most emotionally charged discussion at one meeting centered on the unintended consequences of AI automation on entry-level roles. CHROs expressed genuine anxiety about a lost generation of workers while simultaneously acknowledging the inevitability of cost savings pressure. A key takeaway: CHROs should look to restructure rather than eliminate entry-level roles.

“The reason the skilling is so hard is this is constantly changing. We have to be comfortable we might get it wrong.

- a CHRO at a recent M1 meeting

One executive painted a stark picture from experience. Describing a 10-year period when the company did very few entry-level hires, “we woke up five years later and we had no pipeline for any of our jobs. And that’s what I worry about [with AI]. There’s the sexiness. You can get intoxicated by it.” But if an organization cuts “20,000 jobs in the next three years, [and] they’re all coming out of the bottom, then you wake up three years later and you don’t have that pipeline.”

That CHRO is focused on a few solutions:

- **Creating new roles for entry-level workers as AI trainers and quality controllers:** For instance, they’d watch to see which questions get a thumbs down in AI tools and then work with the learning leader to make changes to the content.
- **Practicing the apprenticeship model when it makes sense:** This approach recognizes that AI can handle transactions, but cannot replicate the nuanced learning from human mentorship, such as junior workers sitting next to a 15-year payroll expert and being directly trained.
- **Giving them opportunities to be ‘fresh eyes’ for opportunities:** Because they don’t have to unlearn existing practices, young workers can better spot where automation might help. “We have found them to be far better than more experienced people because they don’t know anything.”

CEO Avatars: An Authenticity Question

CHROs are grappling with the technical possibilities and ethical implications of their CEO having digital twins, revealing deep philosophical tensions and authenticity in leadership communication.

One participant mentioned a practical use: “There’s probably elements of it which just give CEOs back time.” For her executive team members, navigating time zones for international calls “crushes people,” and sending a twin could be helpful.

But the group expressed significant authenticity concerns. “I think personifying something that is AI is fair game. But replicating a human in AI—I would not want my

CEO replicated." Others thought an agent that's transparently depicted as an ambassador or representative of the CEO might be more acceptable, if done intentionally. "You have to be really purposeful."

The Agent Workforce: Adding A New Labor Category

The concept of an "agent workforce" was perhaps the most paradigm-shifting discussion, with CHROs beginning to think of AI agents as a distinct category of their workforce requiring their own management frameworks. In addition to full- and part-time employees, one CHRO said, "we have contingent labor. Then we have our agent labor. There's a certain amount of augmentation, but actually it's like redesigning roles."

CHROs said they have been impressed with the sophistication of their agents' work. One said her organization had been thinking of branding their new AI tool as an animal or a bird, but she's been so impressed with its emotional intelligence that they are personifying the tool's brand instead. Still, "there's ethics associated with this. How much do you personify and what does that mean?"

CHROs envision their workforces will have dozens if not hundreds of AI agents working in specialized functions or with specific teams. "Just like you have thousands of employees, you'll have multitudes of these agents in the agent workforce," one said. "You'll quantify it in some way, and it'll have to intersect with the design of the workforce."

A Time Liberation Challenge: The CHRO as Chief Utilization Officer

What happens when AI frees up human time? Are workers suddenly being creative super innovators who responsibly use all those extra hours?

The results are sobering. In some cases, of course, AI is filling a gap where workers don't have the resources they need. And if you have a workforce that's high on turnover, burnout, or overtime, a little more slack in the system could be a good thing.

But for many other workers, "they're doom scrolling. ... They're spending time on Reddit," said one CHRO. As another put it: "We know what to do when an entire job is eliminated. But when just a fraction of time is eliminated?... This is the complexity of it. If I had to [convey] anything I would say be clear about what you want people do with that free time, because one of two things will happen. They will either do nothing," the CHRO said. Or "they will start doing other stuff you don't want them doing to fill the void."

Finally, be prepared that what you tell them now might change in six months. The same CHRO said plans to utilize HR business partners to do more coaching and role playing with the time freed up by AI has already changed with the introduction of AI coaching tools. "The reason the skilling is so hard is this is constantly changing," the CHRO said. "We have to be comfortable we might get it wrong."

The Cognitive Load Shift: When Easy Work Disappears

We all know the satisfaction of crossing things off a to-do list. But when AI eliminates routine tasks, employees lose the mental breaks that transactional work provide, leading to cognitive overload and, paradoxically, the risk of lower productivity.

One CHRO articulated this counterintuitive problem: "When you do transactional work, you cross 100 things off your to-do list a day and you feel really good about it. Or if you answer transactional questions all day, you get 10, 20 "thank you"s. But when you do the hard work [left over when AI routinizes transactional tasks] nobody's telling you thank you."

The fractional nature of how AI is reshaping jobs means that in many cases it's replacing parts of jobs, rather than entire jobs. CHROs discussed how they might help workers maintain some routine work to take those cognitive breaks, but one thing was clear: Jobs will have to be redesigned with that in mind. "That's not a sustainable model," said one CHRO about doing 100% more cognitively taxing work. "I think we have to be really thoughtful about that."

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