



LEADING HR | Meeting Recap

Global Attrition: Early Tenure, AI, and Leadership Trends



5 Min Read

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In our first session of the new Request and Connect Virtual Series, members of both the M1 CHRO and M1 Talent Communities met earlier this week to discuss Global Attrition, a topic that was requested by one of our Talent community members.

Here are 6 key insights that emerged that might provide inspiration for how you approach attrition at your organizations along with some follow up research on the best sources for global attrition.

1. A noticeable shift: people leaving without another job lined up

This isn't just early-career behavior anymore, it's showing up across levels. Several leaders noted a growing pattern of employees choosing to step away before securing their next role, something that feels counterintuitive given current market conditions. The drivers seem less about compensation and more about lifestyle, flexibility, and career reset moments. As one leader put it, it's becoming "harder to combat" because these are values-based decisions, not transactional ones. That raises a bigger question: are traditional retention levers (comp, title, perks) losing some of their pull?

2. AI is quietly becoming (a positive!) part of the employee experience and retention equation

From AI agents checking in at 7, 30, 60, and 90 days or acting as always-on coaches, the impact is starting to show. One example shared was an AI tool proactively identifying early flight risks—or simply improving retention by consistently asking employees how they're doing (something managers don't always have the capacity to do). In other cases, employees are forming real reliance on these tools—raising the question: does leaving a company now also mean leaving behind a critical work companion?

3. The first 90–180 days may be the most “fixable” attrition window

Multiple organizations with majority front-line employees are seeing attrition highest in the first few months as usual and focusing heavily there. One leader shared that retention jumps significantly if employees make it past the one-year mark, reinforcing how critical early tenure is. What's working? Simple, disciplined interventions: structured onboarding, frequent touchpoints, and even basic things like ensuring new hires actually meet their leader early on

AT A GLANCE

- Employees are increasingly leaving without another role secured, driven by lifestyle and values rather than compensation.
- The first 90–180 days is the highest-risk attrition period for front-line employees but may be the most controllable.
- AI tools are emerging as retention levers, supporting onboarding, engagement, and daily work experience.
- Leadership attrition, even at normal levels, has outsized impact due to limited bench strength and external hiring trends — cultivating a learning organization and internal pipeline is key.
- More organizations are tying engagement and retention metrics directly to leadership compensation.

(which, surprisingly, doesn't always happen). The takeaway: a meaningful portion of attrition may come down to execution, not just market forces.

4. Work expectations are shifting and attrition signals may be delayed

One organization shared that after increasing in-office expectations (moving from three to four days, with some regions at five), there was no immediate spike in attrition, contrary to expectations. However, the emerging hypothesis is that attrition may be delayed, with employees initially trying to adapt for a quarter or two before deciding to leave. Even more interesting is that competitors have similar or stricter policies, yet people are still leaving. So the question becomes: if not flexibility alone, what's really driving the exit and can we better align with other values of our employees?

5. Leadership attrition “on benchmark” still carries significant implications

While ~10% executive-level attrition may be considered normal, leaders pointed out that at this level, attrition isn't about percentages—it's about critical roles and individuals. Even a handful of departures can have outsized impact when bench strength is limited. There was also an insight on succession reality: many organizations say they prioritize internal pipelines, but in practice still hire externally at high rates. The unintended consequence? High-potential leaders lose confidence in their path forward and choose to leave. As one attendee highlighted, “it can be hard to keep bench if they see that the bench never gets the job.”

6. Leadership accountability is getting more tangible and measurable

A growing number of organizations are tying engagement scores — and in some cases retention outcomes — directly to leader compensation. Examples ranged from a defined percentage of annual bonus (e.g., ~10%) to using engagement improvements as a multiplier on incentives. The impact? Increased focus, stronger ownership, and more quality dialogue about employee experience at the leadership level. As one participant shared, it's shifted attrition from “an HR metric” to something leaders are paying close attention to because “it's going to affect my number.”

Taken together, it feels like retention is evolving—from broad programs to more targeted, experience-driven moments that really matter.

Best Sources for Global Attrition?

One question that no one could answer is the best sources of attrition data out there in different industries and regions. The M1 team did a bit of follow up research and concluded while there is no single source, it helps to think of it in tiers:

1. Global / Cross-Industry Benchmarks
2. Regional data for macro validation
3. Industry-specific insights

For leadership and executive attrition, public data is limited but the big legacy staffing firms can usually provide some insight. If you're looking for more of an indicator of what's happening right now in your talent market, it's best to look real-time labor market sensors.

While all of these external data sources will provide some insight, it is most helpful to focus on your own internal trends over time and improving those.

These insights were collected as part of M1's Request and Connect Virtual Series. If you have a topic or question that you'd like to discuss with your peers, please suggest an idea using the form linked in the main menu and homepage.