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RETHINKING AI IN HR:
BALANCING INNOVATION,
RISK, AND HUMAN-CENTRIC
SOLUTIONS

Aptitude Research 2025

FOREWORD: FROM HUMAN-IN-THE-LOOP TO HUMAN-CENTRIC - HR AT THE FOREFRONT OF AI AT WORK



The way we work is evolving rapidly, with AI driving much of this transformation. While it automates tasks, streamlines processes, and analyzes data, new and advanced HR use cases emerge daily. Keeping up can be daunting, especially since many in HR lack deep technical expertise. With pressure to act quickly while ensuring transparency, equity, and compliance, addressing this knowledge gap is critical.

That's why we launched the Human-Centric AI Council (HCAIC): to ensure AI in HR is embraced thoughtfully, with people at the center of every innovation. HR leaders must actively shape AI's future, moving beyond "human-in-the-loop" approaches, which involve decision-making safeguards, to truly human-centric AI, which prioritizes values, enhances experiences, and aligns decisions with the people we serve.

This guide, the first of many HCAIC resources, is designed to help HR leaders evaluate and adopt AI effectively. Drawing on trusted expertise and real-world insights, it offers frameworks, examples, and strategies to ask the right questions, mitigate risks, and achieve meaningful impact.

But this is just the beginning. The HCAIC will continue to explore best practices, foster collaboration, and equip HR leaders to drive AI innovation confidently. Our mission: ensure AI enhances—not replaces—the human experience in HR.

I'm thrilled to share this journey with you. Let's seize the opportunities ahead, tackle challenges together, and create a future where AI elevates us all.

Here's to smarter, bolder, and more human-centric innovation.

Kyle Lagunas

Founder, Human-Centric AI Council

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INTRODUCTION

Let's be honest: AI in HR isn't new anymore. We've been talking about it, dabbling in it, and sometimes even seeing results from it for years. But here's the thing—most of us are still stuck in the shallow end. Early AI applications helped automate repetitive tasks, sure, but now we're being asked to think bigger: to use AI not just to do work but to fundamentally change how work gets done. And that's where things get tricky.

Because let's face it—evaluating AI solutions is messy. We're so busy obsessing over the bias boogeyman or getting dazzled by shiny features that we forget to ask the real questions: Can this tool actually solve the problems in front of us? What's it going to take to make it work in our organization? And what risks are we taking on—beyond just compliance?

The truth is, we need a better playbook. That's where this guide comes in. With insights from expert practitioners, leading consultants, and trusted solution providers to help you rethink how you evaluate AI for HR. When it comes to AI in HR, we need to shift our mindsets—moving from fear and skepticism to intentionality and impact.

So, What's the Problem?

Adopting AI is not as simple as vendors make it sound. The hurdles are real:



Knowledge Gaps: Most HR professionals aren't fluent in AI—and that's okay! But we need to build up that literacy to evaluate and implement these tools effectively.



Hidden Complexity: Some vendors can gloss over the nitty gritty like the level of access their tool might need to integrate with your systems—or the governance headaches that come with it. We need to be more circumspect to find the most viable solutions.

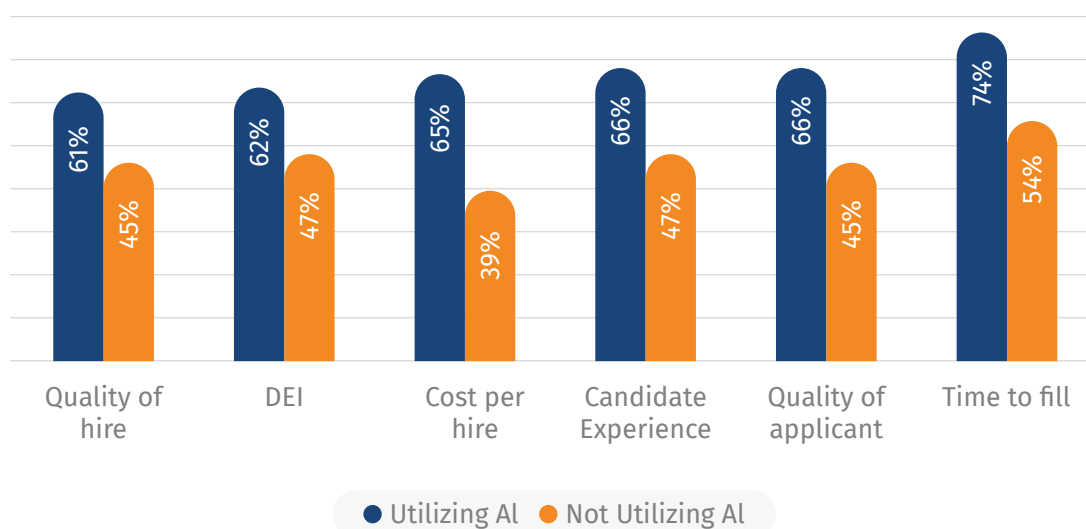


Skepticism and Risk: Avoiding AI altogether because of fear isn't an option anymore. AI-enabled HR is inevitable, and now is the time for us to figure out how to make the most of it.

But the Opportunity? It's Huge.

For those leaning into AI, the results speak for themselves: Figure X below shows more than 20% improvement in key metrics like time to hire, cost to hire, and retention. That's not just incremental progress—that's game-changing. AI can deliver transformative impact if organizations understand and embrace its potential.

How has your organization's performance on each of the following metrics changed since last year?



And let's not underestimate the power of small wins. The keys—as you'll see from the stories shared in this guide—include starting small, proving value, and building trust along the way.

A Better Way to Evaluate AI

That's why we have created this guide. It's built around three pillars to help you evaluate AI use cases like a pro:

01

Impact: Does it actually solve the problem and make a measurable difference?

02

Complexity: What's it going to take to make it work—not just technically but organizationally?

03

Risk: What are the trade-offs, and how do we mitigate them?

But let's be clear: No one is suggesting we get into the ones and zero of a code-level review! It's about asking whether the AI is solving the right problem in the right way, and this framework cuts through the noise and gets to the heart of what really matters.

What You'll Get

This guide is packed with:

- **Insights:** Data and trends on where AI adoption stands today.
- **Frameworks:** Tools and templates to evaluate AI use cases effectively.
- **Expert Commentary:** Advice from people who've been in the trenches and know what works (and what doesn't).
- **Case Studies:** Real-world examples of success stories—and cautionary tales.

Why Now?

Because AI isn't going away. If anything, it's only becoming more integral to the way we work. And the stakes are high—not just for our organizations but for the people and processes we're responsible for.

So, let's cut through the hype, avoid the pitfalls, and get smarter about how we evaluate and adopt AI. Whether you're just starting out or looking to level up, this guide has something for you. Let's dive in.

Meet Our Experts



Bob Pulver,

Principal and Founder at Elevate Your AIQ



Charles Mah,

Chief Customer & Operations Officer at GoodTime



Drea Silva,

Vice President of Talent Acquisition at Niagara Bottling



Dustin Cann,

Director of Talent Acquisition Strategy & Operations at Cisco



Liam Smees,

Head of Consulting at HiredScore



Manjuri Sinha,

Vice President & Head of Go-To-Market Org Success & People Partners at Miro



Meghan Rhatigan,

Vice President of Global Talent Acquisition Experience at Marriott International



Rebecca Volpano,

Vice President of Product Marketing at Cielo Talent



Sarah Smart,

Co-Founder at Horizon Human

01 SECTION

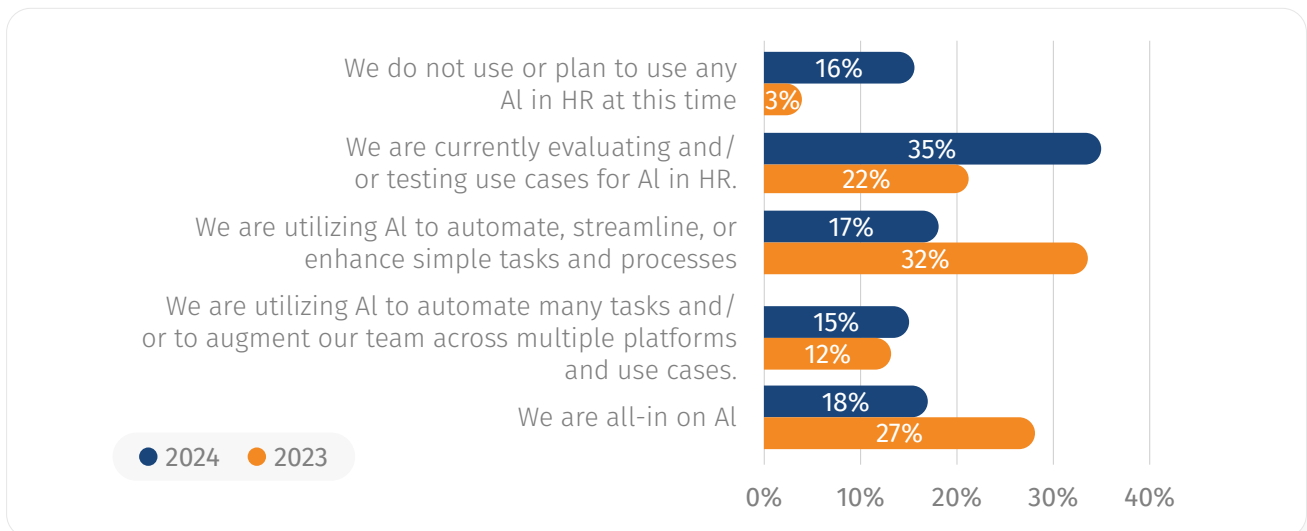


Understanding the Current State of AI in HR

AI in HR isn't exactly breaking news, but it's definitely at a crossroads. For some companies, it's become a game-changer. For others? Well, they're stuck in neutral—held back by fear, complexity, or plain old lack of understanding. So, where do things actually stand?

The Big Picture: Adoption Is Slowing, but Interest Isn't

Here's the paradox: executive support for AI in HR has never been stronger, yet adoption rates are stalling.



At the same time, companies that invested in AI over the past 18 months are reaping the rewards. Meanwhile, organizations that pressed pause are falling behind, unsure how to move forward.

What's causing the bottleneck? According to Rebecca Volpano, it's a knowledge gap: "AI literacy needs to extend beyond HR teams to stakeholders across the business." In other words, it's not enough for your talent team to get it—your IT team, legal counsel, and leadership all need to understand what it takes to make AI work.

Why Some Are Thriving (and Others Aren't)

Let's talk about the divide between AI leaders and laggards. The companies leading the pack aren't necessarily those with the deepest pockets—they're the ones who know how to evaluate and implement AI effectively. Meghan Rhatigan put it perfectly: "The divide between AI leaders and laggards is rooted in the ability to operationalize technology meaningfully."

Leaders are:

- 01 Taking small, manageable steps to prove value early and build trust.
- 02 Aligning AI projects with business objectives, not just chasing trends.
- 03 Getting input from the right stakeholders—before implementation, not after.

Laggards, on the other hand, are often stuck because they're overwhelmed by risk or misled by vendor hype. As Dustin Cann pointed out, "We're not just buying something and expecting it to magically work. We need to understand how it functions and what it takes to make it work."



What's Holding Teams Back?

Let's get specific about the challenges:

- **The Bias Boogeyman:** Bias is a concern, but it's not the only one. As Bob Pulver said, "Instead of fearing bias, we should focus on understanding where and how AI is helping to mitigate these things." Charles Mah added, "How will this solution create greater career accessibility for candidates? How can it enable deeper, more sophisticated analysis of a candidate's capabilities, skills, and potential?" Both highlight AI's potential to address inequality and drive fairer outcomes when implemented thoughtfully.
- **Technical Complexity:** AI tools rarely "just work." Sarah Smart noted, "Complexity and data challenges often overshadow the actual risk of bias." Dustin Cann reinforced this, stating, "It's not about whether the AI works. It's about whether it can work here." Evaluating an AI solution's compatibility with your organization's infrastructure—technically and culturally—is essential.
- **Lack of Literacy:** AI adoption requires a shared understanding across teams. As Rebecca explained, "AI literacy is the missing link—it's the foundation for success." Drea underscored this, sharing, "We conducted a multi-day workshop to walk our HRIS team through the realities of our talent acquisition processes. This helped build their understanding of our unique needs."

The Bottom Line

The current state of AI in HR is both exciting and frustrating. There's so much potential, but unlocking it requires a clear-eyed look at where your organization stands. Are you prepared to close the knowledge gaps, tackle complexity head-on, and move beyond fear? Or are you stuck in neutral, letting others pass you by?

As Liam Smees said, "AI can deliver transformative impact if organizations understand and embrace its potential." The good news? Understanding and embracing that potential isn't rocket science—it's about asking the right questions, engaging the right people, and starting small. We'll get into all of that and more in the next section.

SECTION 02

Beyond the Bias Boogeyman – Understanding AI’s Real Risks

Whenever the topic of AI in HR comes up, there’s one word that instantly dominates the conversation: bias. Of course, bias is and will remain a real concern for anyone working in HR and talent. But it’s not the only concern, and sometimes it’s not even the most pressing one. The problem is, we’ve become so fixated on bias that we’re missing the bigger picture of what it really means to manage risk in AI adoption.

It’s time to expand the conversation.

Let’s Talk About Bias (But Not Stay Stuck on It)

Yes, AI can replicate or amplify bias if it’s not designed and implemented thoughtfully. But here’s the thing: bias already exists in your processes. As Bob put it, “Let’s stop pretending AI is introducing something new; we’re all inherently biased when we review resumes and interview. The question is, ‘Can we use AI to make hiring processes more equitable? Can we use AI to mitigate bias and adverse impact at scale?’” The answer is yes—but only if we’re intentional about how we build, train, and monitor these systems.

The key is shifting the narrative. Instead of avoiding AI because of bias concerns, organizations should focus on building trust through transparency and governance. That means:

- Understanding the data your AI is using—and how that data might impact outcomes.
- Building clear guardrails to ensure your tools are aligned with your values and goals.
- Having a plan for regular audits and adjustments to address any unintended consequences.



The Risks You're Probably Overlooking

While bias gets all the headlines, there are other risks that often fly under the radar but can be just as damaging. Sarah highlighted one of the biggest: complexity. “Complexity and risk are intertwined,” she said. “The more complex the problem you’re asking AI to solve, the longer it takes, the more data it needs, and the more challenging it becomes to implement effectively.”

There are many layers of risk when it comes to AI in HR—technical, organizational, and even cultural. As Manjuri shared, “Culture can be a major success factor for new AI innovations. For example, one of the main driving factors for interview scheduling AI is the ability of interviewers opening up their calendars or sharing their calendars publicly within the organization. And that is one of the biggest cultural hindrances you go through in the initial phases.”

Here are a few other risks you should be paying attention to:



Governance and Compliance

“AI tools often require a level of access to systems and data that can create internal governance headaches if not managed properly,” Dustin notes. This is especially true for global organizations navigating different regulations across markets.



Technical Viability

Just because a tool works in theory doesn't mean it will work in your organization. Effective AI solutions rely on access to clean, comprehensive data from systems like HRIS, LMS, and ATS, but restrictive data governance policies can limit their accuracy and relevance. Charles Mah highlighted the pitfalls of applying AI narrowly, noting, “We see a lot of people looking at high-volume roles in isolation—solving for one process specifically with one AI, and then trying to implement that same AI for a different, more complicated process.” Such approaches risk adding complexity and undermining AI's potential to simplify workflows.



Stakeholder Trust

Meghan pointed out another hidden risk: losing credibility with your team. “If you roll out a tool that doesn't deliver, you're not just wasting money—you're eroding trust and making it harder to adopt future solutions,” she said. Identifying any required organizational changes (cultural, procedural, or otherwise) in advance is an essential step towards mitigating change management issues down the line.

How to Think About Risk Differently

So how do we move beyond the “bias boogeyman” and take a more holistic view of risk? Start by asking the right questions:

- What problem are we trying to solve, and is AI the best solution for it?
- Does the tool fit within our current tech stack, or are there hidden dependencies?
- How much time and data does the AI need to deliver meaningful results?
- What happens if the tool doesn't work as expected—how will that impact trust and future adoption?

Rebecca summed it up perfectly: “Risk isn't just about compliance. It's about understanding what it takes to make things work, where recommendations come from, what actions humans take versus what an AI is doing behind the scenes— and being transparent about everything with your stakeholders.”

Success Story: When Risk Management Goes Right

Take Drea Silva's approach to AI adoption as an example. Instead of diving headfirst into complex solutions, she focused on low-risk, high-impact use cases like interview scheduling.

“We're not trying to change our managers' processes. We're simply making those processes easier to execute,” she said. By starting small and proving the value of AI incrementally, Drea was able to build trust and lay the groundwork for broader adoption.

Doing foundational work ahead of a major innovation is crucial. Manjuri identified a core question to answer upfront, “Do you first of all have processes that are laid out? Because, although it sounds remedial, there are so many companies that I see that don't even have properly defined processes for important things like recruiting and hiring.”

Other, all-in approaches with more complex use cases are more challenging. Sarah shared a cautionary tale after an AI matching tool promised to revolutionize hiring but failed due to mismatched expectations and technical limitations. “We spent 18 months trying to make it work, only to realize it wasn't viable for our use case,” Sarah shared. The fallout? Lost time, lost resources, and a skeptical team that was reluctant to embrace future AI tools.

The Bottom Line

Risk is inevitable, but it's also manageable—if you're willing to broaden your perspective and look beyond the obvious. Bias is just one piece of the puzzle. Governance, technical viability, and stakeholder trust are equally important, and they all need to be part of your evaluation process.

As Meghan put it, “We're not trying to avoid any and all risk; we're defining what it means to manage it effectively in AI adoption.” That's the mindset we need to adopt: one that sees risk not as a roadblock but as a challenge to navigate thoughtfully.

Next, we'll explore a framework to help you evaluate AI use cases holistically—one that balances impact, complexity, and risk to guide smarter decisions.

SECTION

Closing Knowledge Gaps and Building AI Literacy

For HR leaders, one of the biggest barriers to AI adoption isn't technology—it's understanding. AI can feel like an intimidating black box, and many organizations don't know where to begin. The good news? You don't need to be an AI expert to lead adoption effectively. What you do need is a willingness to ask questions, engage the right partners, and build a foundation of literacy that enables smart decision-making.

How Knowledge Gaps Hold Us Back

AI adoption is stalling in many organizations, not because the technology isn't ready but because HR teams aren't. As Meghan observed, "Sometimes the fear of looking uninformed stops us from asking the hard questions. But if we don't ask, we'll never know what's possible."

This hesitation leads to missed opportunities. When teams don't understand how AI tools work—or what they need to succeed—it's easy to make costly missteps. Bob highlighted another common challenge: "There's a tendency to rely too heavily on vendors to do the thinking for us. We need to take ownership of understanding what's happening under the hood."

Expanding AI literacy isn't just about HR teams—it's about creating a shared understanding across key stakeholders, including IT, legal, and leadership. Without this alignment, even the best tools can fail to deliver.



The Essentials of AI Literacy

To close the knowledge gap, HR teams need to understand three foundational areas:



The Basics of AI. AI isn't a one-size-fits-all solution. It encompasses everything from simple automation to complex predictive models. Liam Smees explained, "A lot of teams get stuck because they lump all AI into one bucket. The more you understand its nuances, the easier it is to identify where it fits."



The Role of Data. AI lives and dies by the quality of its data. As Bob Pulver pointed out, "If you're feeding AI incomplete or inconsistent data, you're going to get flawed results. The saying 'garbage in, garbage out' couldn't be more true—and more recently, I like to think of it as 'you are what you eat.'"



Collaborating with Partners. AI adoption isn't an HR-only project. It requires collaboration across departments to ensure tools are technically viable, compliant, and strategically aligned. Meghan shared, "The best results come when we work hand-in-hand with IT and legal from day one, rather than looping them in after decisions have been made."



Practical Strategies for Building AI Literacy and Embracing Discomfort

Building AI literacy is a critical step in successful adoption. It enables teams to evaluate tools effectively, collaborate across functions, and align AI strategies with organizational goals. But let's be honest—learning something new, especially something as complex as AI, often involves stepping outside of our comfort zones. Here's how experts recommend tackling these challenges head-on:

1. Workshops and Peer Learning

Workshops are a powerful way to demystify AI, bringing together cross-functional teams to explore how tools work, the data they need, and the outcomes they enable. Peer learning networks add another dimension. Liam underscored their importance: "Don't go it alone. Peer networks are invaluable for sharing experiments, lessons learned, and best practices."

2. Building Internal Champions

Internal champions are essential for bridging the gap between HR and technical teams. Meghan noted, "Internal champions make all the difference—they understand the context of your organization and can translate that to how AI tools will work in your environment." Identify team members who show curiosity about AI and provide them with resources to become advocates and subject matter experts.

3. Tailored Educational Initiatives

Educational initiatives should fit your organization's needs and culture:

- **Workshops and White Papers:** Drea shared how her team used a multi-day workshop to guide HRIS leaders through the realities of talent acquisition. "It wasn't just about explaining the tools. It was about building their understanding of our goals, pain points, and data challenges."
- **Regular Stand-Ups:** At Dustin's company, they use stand-ups to teach AI basics, covering terminology and practical considerations like system speed and data flow.
- **Community Engagement:** Initiatives like Aptitude Research's HCAIC and vendor-led user groups provide spaces for collaborative learning and innovation.

4. Leaning Into Discomfort

Admitting knowledge gaps is never easy, but it's essential for growth. As Sarah noted, "We need to lean into the discomfort of what we don't know."

Building AI literacy begins with acknowledging gaps and taking proactive steps to address them. This could involve:

- Asking more questions during vendor demos.
- Partnering with IT or data teams to understand system integrations.
- Participating in workshops or conferences to expand knowledge.

Meghan summed it up perfectly: "It's not about being an expert in everything. It's about knowing enough to ask the right questions and make informed decisions."

The Bottom Line

AI literacy isn't a luxury—it's a necessity. As Rebecca put it, "If you don't understand the basics, you'll struggle to evaluate tools, implement solutions, or get buy-in from stakeholders." The good news is that you don't need to go it alone. By leveraging peer networks, internal resources, and a willingness to learn, you can build the knowledge you need to lead confidently.

Next, we'll tackle how to close the knowledge gaps that hold many organizations back—and build the skills you need to lead AI initiatives confidently.

04 / SECTION



Practical Innovation – A New Approach to Evaluating AI Use Cases

If there's one thing we've learned about AI adoption in HR, it's this: success doesn't come from picking the flashiest tools or chasing the latest trends. It comes from thoughtful evaluation. Too often, we focus on features and functionality without asking the bigger, more important questions: Will this actually solve our problem? What's the trade-off in terms of complexity and risk? And does this tool fit our specific organizational needs?

To help you navigate these questions, we've developed a framework for evaluating AI use cases. It's built around three key pillars: impact, complexity, and risk. These pillars help you look beyond the surface to assess whether an AI tool is truly worth your time and resources.

The Three Evaluation Pillars





Impact: Is It Worth It?

Impact isn't just about ROI—it's about solving the right problem. Meghan put it best: "Impact is my true north; it drives the potential to scale effectively across geographies." When evaluating impact, it's essential to consider:

- Does the tool solve a real business problem or just automate a nice-to-have?
- How will the AI's outcomes align with broader organizational goals?
- What metrics will you use to measure success?

Liam emphasized the importance of futureproofing: "The best AI tools don't just address today's challenges—they create pathways for future innovation." Organizations

must ensure that AI solutions not only deliver immediate value but also adapt to long-term strategic objectives.

Manjuri pointed out that impact isn't just about CFO-friendly ROI metrics: "Having an ROI concept to take to your CFO is important, but what about the value for your other stakeholders? If it enhances candidate or employee experience, how will you connect the dots to drive adoption?" In a pilot she led, showcasing measurable improvements in specific job families created enthusiasm across the organization. "The impact was such that some stakeholders even said they'd consider leaving if they didn't get access to the tool," she shared.



Complexity: What's It Going to Take?

Complexity is the sneaky villain of AI adoption, taking many forms—technical, organizational, and cultural. The more complex a solution, the harder it is to implement and the more likely it is to stall.

Technical Complexity:

As Sarah noted, "Technical complexity often undermines perceived ease of implementation." Some vendors oversimplify integration, focusing on features while neglecting the challenges of connecting with proprietary systems or legacy platforms. Evaluating system dependencies is critical to avoid surprises.

Organizational Complexity:

AI tools often require adjustments across multiple teams, not just HR. Rebecca explained, "AI tools demand changes from IT, finance, and even hiring managers."

Beyond training users on software, it's essential to build confidence in the tool's recommendations and integrate them seamlessly into workflows. Resistance to change can significantly slow adoption.

Avoiding Siloed Solutions:

Deploying tools that solve isolated pain points without considering the broader process can create more friction. As Charles warned, "If you apply a tool that covers a segment of your work but not all the work, you're probably wedging a square block in a round hole."

The Bottom Line:

Charles summed it up: "The complexity isn't in the tool itself—it's in everything it touches." Successful adoption requires evaluating how an AI solution fits into your organization's unique ecosystem of work.



Risk: What Are We Trading Off?

Risk isn't just about compliance or bias—it's about understanding trade-offs. As Rebecca said, "Risk isn't just about compliance. It's about understanding the trade-offs and being transparent about them with your stakeholders." Risks can include:

- **Compliance Risks:** Does the tool meet regulatory requirements across all markets where you operate?
- **Operational Risks:** What happens if the tool doesn't deliver as promised? How will that impact your team's trust in AI?

- **Strategic Risks:** Could investing in this tool limit your ability to adopt better solutions later?

Bob also touched on the importance of assessing risks beyond the immediate technical details: "The real risk isn't just in whether the AI works—it's in whether your people and processes are ready to work with it. A tool might check every technical box but fail because the other pieces working around and within it aren't optimized."



Applying the Framework: Our Experts' Experiences

Story 1: Interview Scheduling – A Low-Risk, High-Impact Starting Point

When organizations are exploring AI, interview scheduling often emerges as an ideal entry point. The problem is straightforward, the benefits are clear, and the risks are relatively low—making it a perfect candidate for proving value early.

As Drea explained, “We started with scheduling because it’s a manageable challenge with tangible benefits. Once stakeholders saw the results, they were more open to exploring other AI capabilities.” The AI-driven scheduling tools she deployed not only saved time but also reduced manual coordination, freeing up recruiters to focus on higher-value tasks.

However, Dustin Cann noted that even a seemingly simple solution like interview scheduling isn’t without its challenges. One major obstacle? Calendar hygiene.

“If the organization doesn’t maintain clean, updated calendars, no scheduling AI can save you. It’s not just about the tool working—it’s about the environment it’s working in,” he said.

Organizations like Meghan’s have tackled this by introducing calendar norms and accountability. “We had to get buy-in from leadership to reinforce expectations for maintaining accurate calendars,” she shared. This focus on process alignment paved the way for smoother adoption and better outcomes.

The result? AI scheduling tools demonstrated measurable gains in efficiency and candidate experience, providing stakeholders with a clear win that built trust in further AI initiatives.

Story 2: Talent Assessment – Balancing Complexity and Impact

Unlike interview scheduling, talent assessment is a more nuanced and high-stakes use case for AI. The goal is ambitious: to evaluate candidates in a way that’s fair, efficient, and predictive of future success. But as Dustin highlighted, “Assessments come with layers of complexity—especially when it comes to how data is collected, analyzed, and used to make decisions.”

One of the key challenges is ensuring the scientific rigor behind the assessment tools. “The best assessment tools are rooted in industrial-organizational psychology and validated with robust data sets,” Dustin explained. However, he cautioned that not all vendors meet this standard, and organizations need to ask hard questions about the science behind their tools.

Another layer of complexity is data integrity. Poorly designed assessments can yield biased or incomplete results, undermining their value. Dustin noted, “It’s not enough to have a flashy AI tool. If the data it’s working with isn’t clean or relevant, the results won’t be either.”

Despite these challenges, Dustin shared how his team successfully implemented an AI-driven assessment tool by prioritizing transparency and stakeholder education. “We spent months engaging hiring managers and explaining how the assessments worked, what the data meant, and how to interpret results responsibly,” he said. This upfront effort helped build trust and ensured the tool was used effectively.

While talent assessment has higher risks than scheduling, its potential impact is significant. By identifying candidates who are not just qualified but also a cultural and strategic fit, these tools can transform how organizations make hiring decisions.

Practical Tips for Evaluating AI Use Cases

As Sarah so smartly said, when evaluating AI HR leaders don't need to be conducting code-level analysis. "It's not about the ones and zeros. It's about asking whether the AI is solving the right problem in the right way."

01

Start Small: Begin with a low-risk, high-impact use case to build trust and demonstrate value.

02

Involve Stakeholders Early: Engage IT, legal, and key business leaders in the evaluation process to avoid surprises down the road.

03

Ask Tough Questions: Push vendors to explain how their tools handle integration, data flow, and governance.

04

Pilot and Iterate: Use pilots to test tools in a controlled environment, gather feedback, and refine before rolling out broadly.

The Bottom Line

The key to successful AI adoption isn't just choosing the most advanced tools—it's evaluating them the right way. By focusing on impact, complexity, and risk, you can avoid common pitfalls and set yourself up for success. As Meghan reminded us, "The tools we choose need to align with our values, our goals, and our ability to execute."

Next, we'll explore how to navigate the balance between innovation and risk—and how to make smarter decisions about the AI tools you choose to adopt.



05 SECTION



Balancing Innovation and Risk – Making Smarter AI Decisions

AI adoption in HR often feels like walking a tightrope. On one side, there's the promise of innovation: streamlining processes, improving outcomes, and delivering real business value. On the other side, there's the ever-present specter of risk: compliance concerns, technical failures, and the possibility of losing your team's trust. The key is finding the right balance—being bold enough to innovate but thoughtful enough to mitigate risks.

The Innovation Imperative

AI isn't a passing trend; it's a transformative capability that can fundamentally change how HR operates. As Liam pointed out, "AI can deliver transformative impact if organizations understand and embrace its potential." The organizations that lean into AI aren't just solving today's problems—they're positioning themselves to thrive in the future of work.

But innovation isn't just about adopting the newest tools. It's about using technology to solve meaningful problems in a way that aligns with your organization's goals and values.

Innovation in AI doesn't come without risks, but most of these challenges are manageable with a strategic approach. As Charles Mah noted, "Risk isn't just about compliance. It's about understanding the trade-offs and being transparent about them with your stakeholders."

By identifying and addressing risks upfront, organizations can navigate the balance between innovation and caution more effectively.

Common Risks and Strategies for Mitigation

1. Compliance and Governance Risks

AI tools often require access to sensitive data, creating potential regulatory and compliance challenges. These risks are heightened for global organizations operating across different legal landscapes.

Solution: Build strong governance frameworks and engage legal and compliance teams early in the evaluation process. Ensure your tools comply with all applicable laws to mitigate liability risks.

2. Technical and Operational Risks

Technical viability is another critical consideration. AI tools that require significant integrations or infrastructure changes can encounter delays or fail entirely. Meghan highlighted the importance of evaluating technical feasibility early: “If you roll out a tool that doesn’t deliver, you’re not just wasting money—you’re eroding trust and making it harder to adopt future solutions.”

Solution: Conduct thorough evaluations of system dependencies and technical requirements before purchase. Pilot projects can help test feasibility in specific environments, minimizing disruptions during full implementation.

3. Stakeholder Trust Risks

A failed AI implementation can erode stakeholder trust, making it more difficult to secure buy-in for future initiatives. As Meghan pointed out, trust is fragile: “If you roll out a tool that doesn’t deliver, you’re not just wasting money—you’re eroding trust.”

Drea echoed the value of starting with simple, impactful use cases: “We’re not trying to change our managers’ processes. We’re simply making those processes easier to execute.”

Solution: Begin with low-risk, high-impact projects like interview scheduling or basic analytics to demonstrate immediate value and build trust across teams.



Key Questions to Guide Smarter Decisions

Q. What Problem Are We Solving?

A. AI isn't a solution looking for a problem—it must address a meaningful challenge. Define the issue clearly, whether it's a bottleneck in hiring, data quality concerns, or the need to improve decision-making.

Q. Is This the Right Tool for the Job?

A. Push vendors to provide specific details about how their tools work, the data they require, and their suitability for your organization. As Liam put it, "Ask whether the AI is solving the right problem in the right way for your organization's specific needs."

Q. What Are the Trade-Offs?

A. Every tool comes with trade-offs, whether they involve complexity, bias, or steep learning curves. Evaluate these carefully, and be transparent with stakeholders about potential challenges and benefits.

Q. How Will We Measure Success?

A. Set clear metrics beyond ROI. Consider how the tool impacts efficiency, effectiveness, and team satisfaction. As Drea noted, "We're not trying to change our managers' processes. We're simply making those processes easier to execute."

By addressing these risks and asking the right questions, organizations can strike the balance needed to adopt AI thoughtfully and effectively. With a clear roadmap and a focus on transparency, AI becomes a driver of meaningful innovation rather than a source of uncertainty.

Practical Tips for Smarter AI Decisions



Start Small, Think Big: Begin with low-risk use cases to build confidence, then expand into more complex projects as your team gains experience.



Engage Stakeholders Early: Bring IT, legal, and business leaders into the conversation from the start to avoid surprises later.



Test and Iterate: Run pilots to gather data, refine the implementation, and address any challenges before scaling up.



Communicate Transparently: Be upfront about the risks, trade-offs, and expected outcomes to build trust and alignment.

The Bottom Line

Balancing innovation and risk isn't about playing it safe or going all in—it's about finding the sweet spot where meaningful progress happens. By being thoughtful, transparent, and intentional, you can lead your organization toward smarter, more impactful AI decisions.

CONCLUSION: THE PATH FORWARD – SMARTER, BOLDER AI ADOPTION IN HR

If there's one thing we hope you take away from this guide, it's this: AI is here to stay, and its impact on HR will only grow. But unlocking its potential isn't about diving headfirst into every shiny new tool. It's about thoughtful evaluation, intentional adoption, and a willingness to learn along the way.

We've covered a lot of ground—from understanding where AI adoption stands today, to addressing risks, building literacy, and balancing innovation with practicality. Along the way, you've heard from some of the sharpest minds in the industry who've been in the trenches and know what it takes to make AI work in real-world HR settings.

Key Takeaways



AI Isn't Just a Tool—It's a Capability: As Liam put it, "AI can deliver transformative impact if organizations understand and embrace its potential." To do that, you need to evaluate solutions not just for what they can do but for how they align with your unique challenges, goals, and values.



Start Small, Think Big: Incremental adoption is the way forward. Low-risk, high-impact use cases like interview scheduling or candidate screening are great starting points. As Drea said, "Once stakeholders see the ease and efficiency, they'll be more open to expanding AI capabilities."



Balance Innovation with Risk: Risk isn't something to avoid—it's something to manage thoughtfully. Whether it's compliance, complexity, or stakeholder trust, understanding the trade-offs and addressing them upfront is key.



Invest in Literacy and Learning: AI adoption isn't plug-and-play. Building internal expertise and engaging with external communities are critical steps toward successful implementation. "Don't go it alone," Dustin advised. "Find a community of peers to share experiments and lessons learned."

The Opportunity Ahead

AI in HR isn't just about streamlining processes or saving time—it's about reimagining what's possible. It's about enabling your team to focus on what they do best while using technology to tackle the repetitive and the complex. And ultimately, it's about creating better experiences—for your employees, your candidates, and your stakeholders.

As Bob said, "We need to look at this strategically, not just in terms of time horizons, but holistically." That's the opportunity in front of us—to not just adopt AI but to adopt it thoughtfully, strategically, and in a way that drives real value.

Your Next Steps

So, where do you go from here? Here's a quick checklist to get started:

1. **Evaluate Your Current Processes:** Identify the pain points and bottlenecks where AI could make the biggest impact.
2. **Engage the Right Stakeholders:** Bring IT, legal, and leadership into the conversation early to ensure alignment.
3. **Use the Three Pillars Framework:** Assess AI solutions based on impact, complexity, and risk to make smarter decisions.
4. **Pilot and Iterate:** Start with a low-risk use case, gather feedback, and refine before scaling up.
5. **Invest in Education:** Build AI literacy across your organization to empower your team and foster confidence in new technologies.

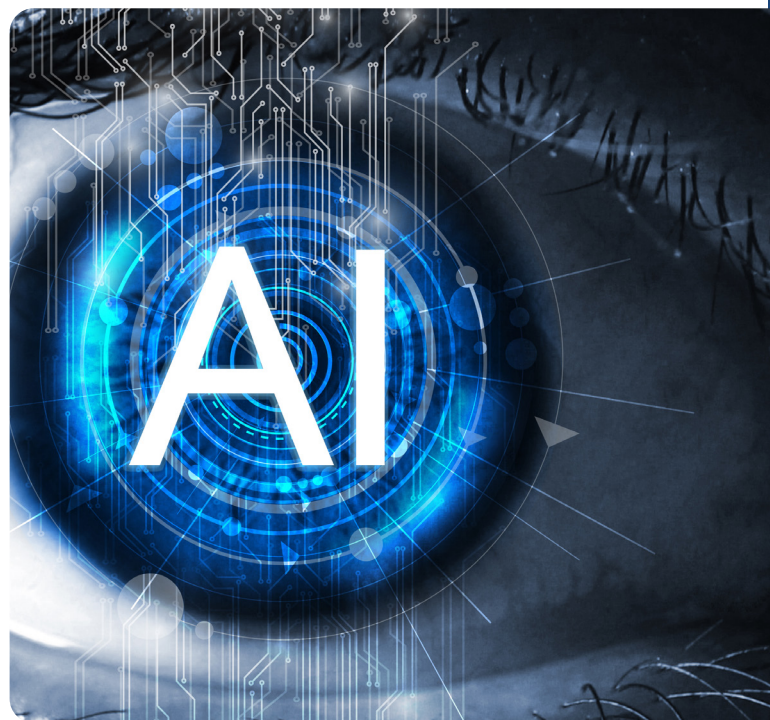
The Future Is Ours to Shape

The future of work is being written right now, and AI is a central character in the story. But how that story unfolds is up to you. By approaching AI adoption with curiosity, intentionality, and a commitment to learning, you have the power to shape a future where technology and people work together to achieve extraordinary outcomes.

And Manjuri had an incredible point: "As HR leaders, we're in the driver's seat to bridge the divide with our partners in IT. We don't need to be the AI experts—the solution may come from the tech team, but the story is ours. We're the people experts, and this is a new evolution of our role—to engage our colleagues more intentionally by clearly articulating the challenges we face, so they can help us find the right technical solutions to drive impact."

As Sarah said, "We need to lean into the discomfort of what we don't know." That's where growth happens. And that's where the best opportunities lie.

So, let's get to it. Evaluate smarter. Automate better. Lead boldly. The future of HR is waiting—and you're the one who gets to shape it.





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