

CHREATE RETROSPECTIVE

# Ten Years Later

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*How the 2015 Future of HR Forecasts Held Up Against 2025 Reality*



A Review and Analysis by

**Innovation Resource Center for Human Resources (IRC4HR®)**

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## Executive Summary

On May 21, 2015, HR, academic, and business leaders gathered at Electronic Arts for the Future of HR project summit. Their mission: predict how work, workers, and organizations would transform by 2025, and define the capabilities HR would need to remain relevant.

The Future of HR initiative launched in September 2013 when a group of CHROs began to explore the profession's future through interviews and research. The project continued to evolve through multiple phases, with the foundational work consisting of:

- **Phase One** was funded by the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) and the National Academy for Human Resources (NAHR) and culminated in June 2014 with twenty CHROs identifying four pivotal arenas for the profession's advancement.
- **Phase Two** was funded by NAHR, SHRM, and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), expanded to 45+ leaders across four teams, and culminated with the May 2015 summit. Project leaders John Boudreau and Ian Ziskin guided the effort, which later became known as CHREATE (The Global Consortium to Reimagine HR, Employment Alternatives, Talent, and the Enterprise).<sup>\*</sup> In this review and analysis, we refer to the work of the CHREATE team.

The teams produced a comprehensive framework: five forces of change, four possible future scenarios, five organizational capabilities, and five new HR roles. Futurists advised the ten-year horizon as close enough for specific implications, yet distant enough to push thinking beyond incremental extensions of the present. It was one of the most ambitious HR forecasting efforts in the profession's history.

A decade later, we can finally assess their accuracy. The verdict: **remarkably prescient about what would change, but nobody predicted how it would happen.** A global pandemic compressed a decade of transformation into eighteen months. Generative AI evolved from a research curiosity to an existential question for the profession. The Great Resignation forever changed the power dynamics between employers and employees.

**Overall Grade: A-** *Strong directional accuracy with underestimated magnitude and unforeseen catalysts.*

<sup>\*</sup> IRC4HR provided funds in subsequent phases of the project, and two current IRC4HR trustees, Richard Antoine and Eva Sage-Gavin, along with executive director, Jodi Starkman, contributed to the work in multiple phases of the project.

## Background: The CHREATE Project

In September 2013, a group of HR executives began exploring the future of their profession through interviews, focus groups, and research. Over the following year, twenty CHROs were interviewed about current and future expectations for HR, the profession's readiness, and gaps requiring attention.

With funding from the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) and the National Academy of Human Resources (NAHR), **Phase One (2013-2014)** culminated in a June 2014 gathering. The CHROs identified four pivotal arenas for accelerating the profession's progress:

- Aligning HR with value creation
- Shaping constituent expectations
- Rewiring HR's work and tools
- Enhancing the HR talent pipeline

During **Phase Two (2014-2015)** volunteer HR leaders formed four teams to address these arenas, eventually engaging 45+ leaders from diverse backgrounds. Funded by NAHR, SHRM, and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), the teams developed a shared, evidence-based vision of the workplace in 2025, choosing a ten-year horizon on futurists' advice: close enough to draw specific implications, far enough to move beyond incremental thinking. Teams validated findings through 50+ focus groups, interviews, and surveys with executives inside and outside HR.

Phase Two concluded at the **May 21, 2015 Summit at Electronic Arts**, where teams presented their findings, including the "Five Forces of Change" and the organizational capabilities and new HR roles needed to address them.

**Phase Three and Beyond (2015-2018)** was about enabling action by translating findings into tangible tools. With funds from SHRM, NAHR, IRC4HR, and several other organizations, the initiative became known as CHREATE (The Global Consortium to Reimagine HR, Employment Alternatives, Talent, and the Enterprise) and involved more than 60 CHROs and thought leaders volunteering on five teams. Links to the outputs from their efforts can be found at the end of this report.

The original project team adopted a logic model: *"If these trends occur, then these effects on business occur, which lead to changes in necessary organizational capabilities, which lead to changes in work, workers, and organizations, which reveal the future HR roles, operating models, and tools."*

This document focuses on the outcomes of the May 2015 Summit and assessing how close the 10-year predictions made in 2015 were to the reality at the close of 2025.

## Part I The Five Forces of Change

The CHREATE team identified five forces predicted to create major disruptive change in society, business, and work. Here's how each prediction fared against reality.

### Force 1: Exponential Technology Change

**GRADE: A-**

*Direction correct, magnitude exceeded expectations.*

**2015 PREDICTION** *Technological breakthroughs would produce exponential disruptions. Rapid adoption of robots, autonomous vehicles, AI, and global collaboration tools would force continuous workforce adaptation. Organizations would need flexible, distributed, and transient/temporary workforces adapting to continuous reinvention cycles.*

**2025 REALITY** Correct direction. The velocity of changes exceeded all expectations. The 2015 team envisioned steady AI evolution. What arrived was ChatGPT in November 2022, triggering the fastest technology adoption in history. By January 2025, 61% of HR leaders were actively deploying generative AI (up from 19% in June 2023), per [Gartner's AI in HR research](#). AI adoption in HR recruitment reached 72% in 2025 ([HireVue, 2025](#)). The technology revolution happened; it just arrived faster and more dramatically than anyone could have anticipated.

### Force 2: Social & Organizational Reconfiguration

**GRADE: B+**

*Gig economy prediction correct; organizational structure transformation overestimated.*

**2015 PREDICTION** *Increased democratization would shift organizations from hierarchy to power-balanced, network-based structures. Democratized access to projects that would build skills that drive careers. Work relationships would become more project-based and less employment-based. Workers would join organizations based on aligned purpose rather than filling jobs. Diverse 'employment' models would emerge: part-time, full-time, freelance, outsourced.*

**2025 REALITY** Partially correct. The gig economy exploded: 76.4 million Americans now freelance (36% of the workforce), with projections reaching 87 million by 2027, per [Statista](#). The EU counts 43 million platform workers in 2025. Network-driven collaboration and organization design have become more common, and workers (especially younger ones) are increasingly seeking purpose-aligned employment opportunities, but the 'network-based holacracy' vision didn't materialize. Hierarchies and top-down power structures have proven resilient, and today's blended workforces (where companies manage full-time employees alongside contractors, freelancers, and now AI agents) are not quite the project-based employment model that was predicted.

## Force 3: A Truly Connected World

### GRADE: A

*Predicted outcome achieved via unforeseen catalyst.*

**2015 PREDICTION** *Information would be more abundant and available to everyone. Work would be accomplished from anywhere through mobile devices and real-time communication. Global 24/7 operations with distributed workforces would become standard.*

**2025 REALITY** Correct. But COVID-19 was the unforeseen accelerant. Before March 2020, only [6% of Americans worked](#) primarily from home. Within weeks, [40% shifted to remote work](#). The prediction was right; the pathway was unimaginable. Hybrid work became the default for knowledge workers. The 2015 team foresaw the destination but not the forced march to reach it.

## Force 4: All-Inclusive Global Talent Market

### GRADE: B+

*Directionally correct; demographic shifts materialized as predicted; credentialing evolved differently than envisioned.*

**2015 PREDICTION** *Multiple generations working longer, today's minorities becoming majorities, work seamlessly distributed globally through 24/7 operations. Skills and capabilities emphasized over traditional credentials.*

**2025 REALITY** needs to be unpacked across all dimensions of prediction:

### Demographic shifts and new credentials

[Recent data shows](#) workers 65+ now outnumber new hires under 25 in some sectors; majority-minority states have expanded; global work distribution is standard. The 'new credentials' prediction was prescient, though the form (skills-based hiring, microcredentials, certificate programs) differed from the traditional credentialing bodies originally envisioned.

### Skills-based hiring: policy progress, patchy execution

Mixed results. Skills-based hiring gained significant traction but the gap between policy and practice remains wide. According to [TestGorilla's State of Skills-Based Hiring 2025](#), 85% of employers now use some form of skills-based hiring (up from 81% in 2024 and 73% in 2023), and 53% have eliminated degree requirements, a 77% increase from 2024 when only 30% had removed them.

## The implementation gap

Research from [Harvard Business School and the Burning Glass Institute \(February 2024\)](#) reveals a gap: fewer than 1 in 700 hires actually benefited from companies dropping degree requirements. Of companies that removed requirements, only 37% (“Skills-Based Hiring Leaders” like Apple, Walmart, and Koch Industries) increased non-degree hiring by nearly 20%; 45% made announcements but no real changes; and 18% backslid after initial gains.

## Public sector leading the change

On the public sector front, [over half of U.S. state governments](#) have now adopted skills-based hiring policies, with [22 states taking executive or legislative action](#) to remove unnecessary degree requirements from government jobs. A [Brookings analysis](#) found public sector job postings requiring bachelor’s degrees fell from 51% to 42% between 2022 and 2024. The ‘paper ceiling’ cracked but didn’t shatter. Candidates without degrees still face hiring disadvantages despite policy changes.

## Force 5: Human & Machine Collaboration

### GRADE: A-

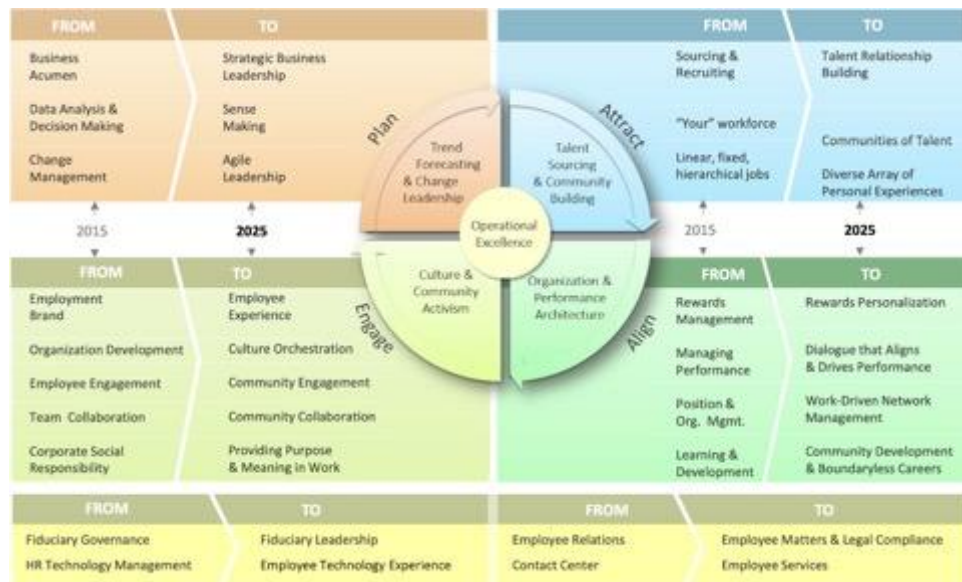
*Vision achieved; human/organization adaptation and work redesign are still catching up.*

**2015 PREDICTION** *Analytics, algorithms, and automation would enhance productivity and decisions. Big data used for insights. Organizations would evolve from ‘people versus machines’ to optimally designing tasks that people and computers successfully share.*

**2025 REALITY** Accurate, with somewhat concerning undertones. AI now handles resume screening (65% of companies use AI for hiring), sentiment analysis, personalized learning paths, and predictive retention analytics. Per [Gartner](#), 82% of HR leaders plan to deploy agentic AI capabilities within the next 12 months. But concerns persist: 78% of organizations struggle with AI/legacy system integration ([Zapier](#).)

## Part II HR Capability Shifts

The CHREATE team predicted specific shifts in HR capabilities across five domains: Plan, Attract, Align, Engage, and Operational Excellence. The framework mapped transitions from 2015 practices to 2025 requirements.



Here is how the predictions panned out.

### 1. PLAN: Trend Forecasting & Change Leadership

| FROM (2015)                                | TO (2025 Predicted)           | 2025 Reality                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Business Acumen</b>                     | Strategic Business Leadership | <b>Achieved in leading companies.</b> <a href="#">CHROs increasingly</a> report to CEO, sit on boards (Conference Board). But bifurcation: <a href="#">strategic vs. administrative</a> HR widening (McKinsey). |
| <b>Data Analysis &amp; Decision Making</b> | Sense Making                  | <b>Partial.</b> People Analytics <a href="#">grew</a> (\$2.96B market) but faced <a href="#">recent contraction</a> . 59% of <a href="#">HR lacks data literacy</a> (AIHR). Leading companies excel; most lag.  |

| FROM (2015)       | TO (2025 Predicted) | 2025 Reality                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Change Management | Agile Leadership    | <b>Mixed.</b> COVID forced agility. But Gartner: <a href="#">75% of HR leaders say</a> managers are overwhelmed. Change fatigue is endemic. Research in <a href="#">Oakes' Culture Renovation</a> found that high-performing companies have reframed disruption as competitive advantage rather than exhaustion and treating agility as an ongoing capability rather than episodic transformation. The gap between these 'agility natives' and the fatigued majority mirrors the CHRO bifurcation noted above. |

## 2. ATTRACT: Talent Sourcing & Community Building

| FROM (2015)                      | TO (2025 Predicted)                   | 2025 Reality                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sourcing & Recruiting            | Talent Relationship Building          | <b>Achieved via technology.</b> AI sourcing platforms, talent marketplaces standard. CRM-style talent relationship tools are common.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| "Your" Workforce                 | Communities of Talent                 | <b>Largely achieved.</b> Extended workforce (freelancers, contractors, partners) normalized. Talent flows across companies accepted.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Linear, Fixed, Hierarchical Jobs | Diverse Array of Personal Experiences | <b>Partial.</b> <a href="#">Gig economy thriving (&gt;70M freelancers)</a> . 25% of large companies have implemented internal talent marketplaces (SHRM 2025) which is substantial progress, though not yet mainstream. But internal job architectures are still largely traditional. Skills-based organizations emerging but not yet mainstream ( <a href="#">LinkedIn Learning Report</a> ). |

## 3. ENGAGE: Culture & Community Activism

| FROM (2015)      | TO (2025 Predicted) | 2025 Reality                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Employment Brand | Employee Experience | <b>Achieved.</b> Employee Experience Manager was LinkedIn's #5 ' <a href="#">Jobs on the Rise' 2023</a> . <a href="#">EX platforms</a> (\$6.7B market). |

|                                 |                           |                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Organization Development        | Culture Orchestration     | <b>Partial.</b> Culture recognized as critical. But per <a href="#">Gallup</a> : only 21% employees engaged globally (2024). Engagement declining.                  |
| Corporate Social Responsibility | Purpose & Meaning in Work | <b>Achieved.</b> <a href="#">Purpose-driven work central to attraction/retention</a> . Great Resignation proved employees willing to leave for purpose and meaning. |

#### 4. ALIGN: Organization & Performance Architecture

| FROM (2015)            | TO (2025 Predicted)                          | 2025 Reality                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rewards Management     | Rewards Personalization                      | <b>Emerging.</b> 51% of companies improved non-cash rewards; 15% offer personalized options ( <a href="#">Salary.com</a> ).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Managing Performance   | Dialogue that Aligns & Drives Performance    | <b>Significant progress.</b> Major companies (Adobe, Deloitte, Microsoft, GE) abandoned annual reviews for continuous feedback. 80% of employees prefer immediate feedback to annual reviews ( <a href="#">Adobe</a> ). Employees receiving weekly feedback are 2.7x more engaged ( <a href="#">Gallup</a> ). Continuous feedback correlates with 44% better talent retention ( <a href="#">Betterworks/SHRM</a> ).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Position & Org. Mgmt.  | Work-Driven Network Management               | <b>Emerging.</b> Skills-based models gaining traction. Internal mobility now a core L&D deliverable ( <a href="#">LinkedIn Learning</a> ). But hierarchical job models still dominate most organizations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Learning & Development | Community Development & Boundaryless Careers | <b>Partial.</b> Across global education, workforce development, and community programs, investment and participation in skills development has risen, driven by digital transformation, automation, and the push for Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). U.S. corporate training reached \$102.8B in 2025 ( <a href="#">Training Magazine</a> ). Internal mobility recognized as critical ( <a href="#">LinkedIn Learning Report</a> ). Despite all these efforts, 60% of new managers underperform in their first two years due to lack of training ( <a href="#">CEB/Gartner</a> ), costing the U.S. economy \$960B-\$1.2T annually ( <a href="#">Gallup via Wharton</a> ). |

## 5. OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

| FROM (2015)                     | TO (2025 Predicted)                 | 2025 Reality                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Fiduciary Governance</b>     | Fiduciary Leadership                | <b>Achieved.</b> As employment relationships evolved (gig, remote, global), legal/compliance complexity increased. 61% of HR leaders now conduct pay equity audits annually ( <a href="#">Salary.com</a> ).                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>HR Technology Management</b> | Employee Technology Experience      | <b>Achieved.</b> HR tech market grew to \$40B (2024), projected to \$82B by 2032 ( <a href="#">Fortune Business Insights</a> ). Cloud-based solutions dominate at 70% of spending ( <a href="#">Mordor Intelligence</a> ).                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Employee Relations</b>       | Employee Matters & Legal Compliance | <b>Achieved but more complex.</b> Global employment laws, varied contracts, and hybrid work created new challenges. Compliance technology is essential for managing complexity.                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Contact Center</b>           | Employee Services (Concierge)       | <b>Achieved.</b> 61% of HR leaders now deploying GenAI, with chatbots as the top use case ( <a href="#">Gartner 2025</a> ). IBM's AskHR handles 10M interactions with 94% containment and 40% cost reduction ( <a href="#">IBM</a> ). By 2029, agentic AI expected to resolve 80% of service issues autonomously ( <a href="#">Gartner</a> ). |

**Note** During Phase Three (completed in May 2016), the original five HR roles (described below) were consolidated to four, and related capabilities were refined based on additional input. This assessment evaluates the Phase Two predictions as they existed in 2015, representing the ten-year forecast horizon. The subsequent refinements reflect the iterative nature of the CHREATE process rather than a repudiation of the original framework.

## Part III The Five Predicted Roles

Perhaps the boldest predictions in the CHREATE framework were five entirely new HR roles the team anticipated would emerge by 2025.

### 1. The Organizational Performance Engineer

**GRADE: B**

*Capabilities emerged; unified role title didn't*

**2015 PREDICTION** *An expert in new ways of working. A facilitator of virtual team effectiveness, developer of leadership, expert at talent transitions and organizational principles such as agility, networks, power, and trust.*

**2025 REALITY** This role is fragmented rather than consolidated. Elements exist across: Organization Development Specialists, Organizational Effectiveness leaders, Internal Consultants, and HR Business Partners with OD responsibilities. The holistic 'Organizational Engineer' title didn't emerge, but the capabilities were distributed across multiple roles.

### 2. Culture Architect and Community Activist

**GRADE: A**

*Highly accurate prediction; role exists and growing*

**2015 PREDICTION** *A culture expert, advocate, and brand builder. Connects workers' purpose to the organization's mission. Adept at principles of values, norms, and beliefs, articulated through virtual and personal means.*

**2025 REALITY** This prediction proved remarkably accurate. The Culture Architect dimension emerged strongly through employee experience platforms ([\\$6.7B market](#)), culture measurement tools, and the proliferation of dedicated culture roles. The role exists under various titles: Chief Culture Officer, VP of Culture, Culture & Engagement Lead, and Employee Experience Director. COVID's shift to remote work made 'virtual culture' expertise critical. [LinkedIn's 2023 'Jobs on the Rise'](#) featured Employee Experience Manager (#5). The function became essential; the exact title varies. The 'Community Activist' component manifested unexpectedly through corporate activism: companies like Airbnb, Levi Strauss, and Gap took public stances on immigration, reproductive rights, and social issues to align with stated values. This peaked 2018-2022 before recent political headwinds prompted some retrenchment.

### 3. The Global Talent Scout, Convener & Coach

**GRADE: B+**

*Capabilities realized across fragmented roles*

**2015 PREDICTION** *Understands new talent platforms and optimizes relationships between workers, work, and organization using whatever platform is best (free agent, contractor, regular employee). A talent contract manager, talent platform manager, and career/life coach.*

**2025 REALITY** This prediction is split into multiple specialized roles: Talent Acquisition Specialists, Talent Scouts, Workforce Planning Managers, Contingent Workforce Managers, and Career Development specialists. The 'platform manager' aspect emerged in dedicated roles managing relationships with Upwork, Toptal, and similar platforms. The unified role didn't materialize, but each capability exists independently.

## 4. Trend Forecaster and Technology Integrator

**GRADE: A-**

*Prediction achieved; role exists widely but facing sustainability questions*

**2015 PREDICTION** *Expert at manipulating big data, understanding and modeling trends, knows how to code to adjust algorithms, designs work to optimally combine technology, automation, and human contributions.*

**2025 REALITY** This is the People Analytics Leader. The role exploded from 2015-2022, with Google's Project Oxygen/Aristotle inspiring widespread adoption. Titles include: Head of People Analytics, VP of Workforce Analytics, HR Data Scientist, People Insights Leader. The people analytics market reached \$2.96B-\$5.6B by 2022 ([Grand View Research](#)). However, 2023-2024 saw contraction as rising interest rates made 'speculative' functions vulnerable. Recent research from [HR Curator](#) suggests people analytics are seen as a 'luxury' in tight budgets.

## 5. The Social Policy & Community Activist

**GRADE: B**

*Partially realized through CDO and ESG roles, but external influence limited*

**2015 PREDICTION** *A social responsibility leader producing synergy between social goals: economic returns, social purpose, ethics, sustainability, worker health. Influences beyond the organization, shaping policies through community engagement.*

**2025 REALITY** This prediction manifested most clearly in Chief Diversity Officers (CDO) and ESG/Sustainability roles. CDO became one of fastest-growing C-suite titles post-2020. However, 2023-2024 saw DEI role reductions amid economic pressures and political backlash. The 'policy shaping' aspect remains limited; HR rarely shapes external policy. Employee health/wellbeing became HR territory, particularly mental health post-pandemic.

## Part IV What the Team Couldn't Have Anticipated

Even the most prescient forecasters have limitations. Several unforeseen (if not unforeseeable) developments challenged the 2015 vision:

### The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Aftermath (2020-2023)

The ultimate accelerant. A decade of digital transformation compressed into eighteen months. The pandemic didn't change what happened; it changed when and how fast. [McKinsey Global Institute](#) found 25% more workers may need to switch occupations than pre-pandemic. The pandemic accelerated remote work, digital HR, and workforce flexibility. Its aftermath included a mental health crisis that persists: sustained anxiety, burnout, and isolation effects continue to shape workforce expectations and employer responsibilities. [Gallup](#) reports life evaluations and mental health metrics hit record lows by 2024.

### The Great Resignation (2021-2022)

Nobody predicted unprecedented voluntary turnover would shift power to workers. 4 million Americans quit monthly, per [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), reshaping compensation expectations and flexibility demands. However, the power dynamic has since shifted back; by 2024-2025, return-to-office mandates and a cooling labor market returned leverage to employers. The lasting impact: employee expectations were permanently raised, even if their bargaining power fluctuates with economic cycles.

### Return-to-Office Wars

The 2015 team assumed distributed work would be embraced. They didn't anticipate cultural and managerial backlash. RTO mandates sparked fierce resistance, lawsuits, and talent exodus.

### Generative AI Speed

The 2015 team envisioned gradual AI evolution. ChatGPT arrived like a comet in November 2022. By Jan 2025, [61% of HR leaders](#) were deploying GenAI.

### Employee Engagement Decline

Despite all the focus on experience and culture, global engagement dropped to 20% in 2025 ([Gallup State of the Global Workplace 2025](#)). The tools proliferated; the outcomes worsened.

### The DEI Reversal (2023-2025)

Nobody predicted that DEI would shift from corporate priority to corporate liability in three years. After peaking 2020-2022, the function faced the [2023 Supreme Court affirmative action ruling](#) and a [January 2025 federal executive order](#) that prompted [roughly 20% of U.S. companies to eliminate DEI programs](#). The Chief Diversity Officer role, one of the fastest-growing C-suite titles post-2020, became one of the most contracted by 2025.

## Part V Expectations of HR's Key Constituents

**A note on structure:** This section shifts from prediction-vs-reality to a report card comparing the 2015 CEO/board view of HR with how those expectations have evolved by 2025.

As the framework of Forces, Responses, Capabilities, and Roles emerged, a team engaged a sample of HR constituents to assess their agreement and get their input and reactions to the future vision and logic model.

This team conducted 22 interviews with CEOs, Directors, and Board members to uncover their perspectives and perceptions of their experience with HR today and what is needed in the future. They represented companies of mixed revenue and industry profiles.

### What HR's Key Constituents Wanted Then, and What They Got

| Dimension                   | 2015 · CEO / Board view                                                                        | 2025 · Reality                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Strategic role</b>       | HR viewed as administrative; boards pushed CHROs to “significantly expand the role and impact” | 60% of CEOs rate CHROs as highly effective strategic partners ( <a href="#">PwC Pulse Survey, 2024</a> ); bifurcation persists between strategic and administrative HR leaders ( <a href="#">McKinsey, 2025</a> )               |
| <b>Board engagement</b>     | Inconsistent; CHROs attended boards occasionally, usually for compensation topics only         | CHRO-board engagement has increased at nearly 70% of public companies in the past three years; CHROs attend most or every full board meeting at nearly two-thirds of companies ( <a href="#">Conference Board, April 2025</a> ) |
| <b>Scope</b>                | Narrow: compensation, benefits, employee relations, compliance                                 | Expanded: nearly half of CHROs own transformation, sustainability, and brand work ( <a href="#">Russell Reynolds, 2025</a> )                                                                                                    |
| <b>Analytics capability</b> | Limited; data used for reporting, not decision-making                                          | People analytics grew to a \$2.96B-\$5.6B market; only 22% of HR professionals feel their company uses it effectively (HR.com/ <a href="#">Crunchr</a> ); 59% of HR still lacks data literacy ( <a href="#">AIHR</a> )          |
| <b>Business acumen</b>      | Identified as a top gap; HR leaders seen as lacking financial fluency                          | Progress at the top; persistent gap across the broader profession ( <a href="#">Charter</a> )                                                                                                                                   |

|                                     |                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Strategic workforce planning</b> | Aspirational; most planning was headcount-based | Only 12% of U.S. HR leaders conduct strategic workforce planning with a three-year horizon; 73% do operational planning, but few link strategy to future skill needs ( <a href="#">McKinsey, 2025</a> ) |
| <b>Employee experience</b>          | Engagement treated as an annual survey exercise | \$6.7B employee experience management market; yet global engagement sits at 21% ( <a href="#">Gallup, 2024</a> )                                                                                        |

## Progress Report: 2015 vs. 2025

Progress is bifurcated. A significant minority of CHROs have made substantial strides, reporting directly to CEOs, engaging regularly with boards, and demonstrating the strategic capabilities CHREATE envisioned.

However, the majority remain anchored in traditional models. Research indicates continued perception gaps: some board directors still view CHROs as primarily operational rather than strategic partners. The ‘bifurcation between role-model CHROs and all the rest’ suggests the CHREATE vision was achievable, but adoption has been uneven.

What separates the leaders? Typically: expanded scope beyond traditional HR (transformation, sustainability, brand), cross-functional experience, and organizations that invested in CHRO development rather than treating the role as a terminal appointment.

### The Good News

The CHRO’s strategic standing has improved measurably. 60% of CEOs now label CHROs as a highly effective business partner in driving company strategy ([PwC Pulse Survey, 2024](#)). That’s a meaningful shift from 2015 when boards were demanding HR “significantly expand the role and impact.”

CHRO engagement with the board has increased over the past three years at nearly 70% of public companies ([The Conference Board, April 2025](#)). CHROs attend most or every full board meeting at nearly two-thirds of companies surveyed. The “seat at the table” question seems largely settled.

Nearly half of CHROs have responsibilities extending beyond traditional HR duties ([Russell Reynolds, 2025](#)), including transformation, sustainability, and brand work. This addresses the 2015 criticism about HR operating in silos.

## The Persistent Gaps

The 2015 report card's less positive grades remain stubbornly relevant in several areas:

**Analytics** Only 22% of HR professionals feel their company uses HR or people analytics effectively ([HR.com/Crunchr](#)). Few companies are measuring the value of people analytics, especially in terms of improving business performance. And there is a long way to go before business executives realize the full value of their investment in people analytics ([Insight222](#)).

**Business Acumen** Some HR leaders still struggle with the financial and operational complexities of their expanded roles. They don't have the experience or training to fully move beyond their traditional compliance and benefits responsibilities to be a true strategic business partner for the CEO and board ([Charter](#)).

**Strategic Workforce Planning** In the United States, only 12% of HR leaders say they do strategic workforce planning with at least a three-year focus ([McKinsey & Company](#)). While 73% of surveyed organizations conduct full operational workforce planning, only a small share link their strategies to future skill needs.

During the past ten years, the profession has earned credibility through crisis (e.g., COVID proved HR's relevance) more than through the capability-building the 2015 research envisioned. That's not nothing. But it's also not the proactive transformation the researchers hoped for.

## Conclusion: Lessons for the Next Decade

The CHREATE Project stands as one of the more successful HR forecasting efforts of the past decade. Its predictions hit the direction correctly more often than not, even when the timing and catalysts surprised everyone. Four lessons endure:

1. **Trends are predictable; catalysts aren't.** The forces driving change were visible in 2015. COVID-19 and ChatGPT weren't. Prepare for acceleration, not just direction. Plan for multiple scenarios.
2. **Culture eats strategy, and technology, for breakfast.** Holacracy, continuous feedback, and skills-based hiring all faced cultural resistance that slowed adoption far below what the technology made possible.
3. **The CHRO gap is uneven.** Best-in-class CHROs have closed significant ground, but the 2015 critiques about HR leaders lacking analytics, business acumen, and transformation skills remain painfully relevant for many.
4. **Outcomes matter more than tools.** Employee experience platforms and people analytics proliferated. Global engagement still dropped to 20% by 2025. Despite proliferating employee experience platforms and analytics capabilities, employee engagement declined to record lows.

## Looking Ahead: Six Forces for the Next Decade

The next decade will be shaped by forces already visible in 2026:

|                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The generational handoff</b>         | Boomers are finally exiting in volume, Gen Z is entering its prime working years, and four generations now overlap. Career architectures, management norms, and knowledge transfer strategies built for a three-generation model will strain.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>AI as opportunity and obligation</b> | Agentic AI is moving from pilot to production. <a href="#">Gartner projects</a> that by 2029, agentic AI will resolve 80% of common service issues autonomously. At the same time, the <a href="#">EU AI Act</a> , state-level regulation, and emerging workplace standards are turning responsible AI from a nice-to-have into a compliance function HR will co-own with legal. The hard work is doing both at once: deploying fast enough to capture value, and governing well enough to keep employee and public trust. |
| <b>Skills-based execution</b>           | Policy adoption ran ahead of hiring behavior in the 2015-2025 window. Closing that implementation gap is the defining test of the next decade. The 'paper ceiling' cracked; whether it shatters depends on whether internal job architectures catch up to external policies.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

|                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Pay equity pressure</b>              | Transparency laws, pay equity audits, and public scrutiny of compensation practices are reshaping the reward function from cost management to trust infrastructure.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Demographic complexity</b>           | Longer working lives, declining male educational attainment, and shifting immigration dynamics are moving faster than most workforce planning horizons. Functions that cannot model these shifts will be managing surprises rather than strategies.                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Leading through perpetual change</b> | The pace of change is not returning to normal. COVID, the Great Resignation, generative AI, return-to-office reversals, DEI volatility, economic and political volatility brought overlapping waves of disruptions. HR's focus will be to build organizations that can absorb continuous change without burning out the managers and people inside them. This is the meta-capability that defines the next decade. |

The 2015 team asked what HR needed to become by 2025. The answer, mostly, arrived. The question for this decade is narrower (and harder):  
*Will HR translate capability into outcomes this time?*

## Project Materials

[Phase One Executive Summary](#)

[Phase Two Executive Summary](#)

[Phase Three Executive Summary](#)

CHREATE E-book ["Black Holes & White Spaces"](#) (link to free Amazon.com download)

## About the Contributors

This retrospective was produced by IRC4HR with contributions from HR leaders and researchers connected to the original CHREATE project.

### Contributors

| Contributor           | Role                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Background                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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| <b>Jodi Starkman</b>  | Executive Director, IRC4HR. Held advisory and leadership roles at ORC Worldwide, PwC Consulting, IBM, Mercer, and research and nonprofit organizations.                                                        | Making work better for people and organizations by enabling the pracademic research of IRC4HR. Contributed to multiple phases of the CHREATE project.                                       |
| <b>John Boudreau</b>  | Professor Emeritus of Management and Organization and a Senior Research Scientist with the Center for Effective Organizations at the Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California            | Co-led the original CHREATE project. Recognized authority on HR strategy, workforce analytics, and the future of work.                                                                      |
| <b>Ian Ziskin</b>     | Coach, consultant, author and board member, Former CHRO at Northrop Grumman, Qwest Communications, and TRW. President, EXec EXcel Group LLC and co-founder of Consortium for Change and Business inSITE Group. | Co-led the original CHREATE project. Serves on multiple corporate and academic boards.                                                                                                      |
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## About IRC4HR

The Innovation Resource Center for Human Resources (IRC4HR) is a private foundation dedicated to advancing the knowledge and practice of human relations at work through applied research, convenings, and resources that strengthen the impact of HR and management practices on organizations, workers, and society.

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