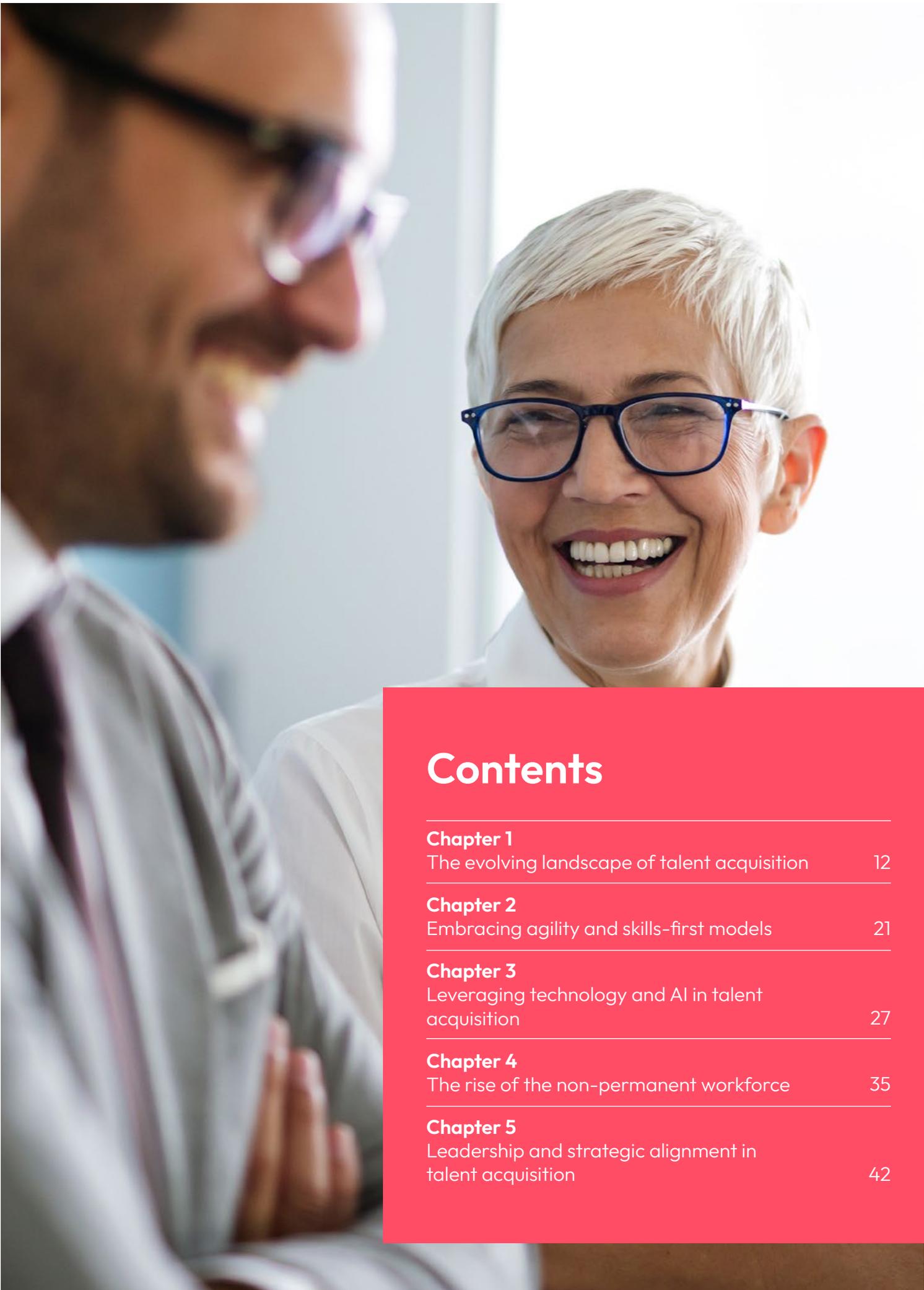




TA Evolution 2026

An essential guide for
Talent Acquisition leaders





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David Barr

Chief Executive Officer – Outsourcing
Robert Walters

“In every corner of the globe, Talent Acquisition is standing at an inflection point. The conversations I’ve had with business leaders, and the insights you’ll find in these pages, make it clear: TA is no longer a back-office function that simply fills roles. It is now a driver of commercial performance, workforce agility, and strategic advantage.

This e-guide captures the voices of fifteen TA leaders from around the world – each of them navigating the same forces reshaping our profession: rapid advances in AI, the shift to skills-first hiring, the integration of talent functions, and the rise of more agile, blended workforce models. Their perspectives make one thing clear: the pace of change is unrelenting, but so is the opportunity for those prepared to adapt.

At Robert Walters, we see TA leaders stepping up as true business partners – fluent in data, adept at coordinating talent across functions, and confident in influencing outcomes at the highest level. But what sets exceptional leaders apart is their ability to stay curious – to ask bold questions, challenge assumptions, and explore emerging trends that will shape tomorrow’s workforce.

Whether you lead a global TA function or are shaping a specialist team in a fast-growth market, this guide will provide you with a distillation of hard-won lessons, practical strategies, and forward-looking ideas you can put to work in your own organisation. By staying curious and embracing change, you can unlock new opportunities to drive revenue growth, enable innovation, and strengthen organisational resilience.”

Our expert contributors



Jennifer Turner

Vice President, Talent Acquisition Partner and Global Lead
Aspen Insurance Group

Jennifer is a seasoned Talent Acquisition leader with over three decades of expertise in strategic sourcing, executive recruitment, and team development. With a bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Jennifer currently holds the position of Vice President, Talent Acquisition Partner and Global Lead at Aspen Insurance. In this capacity, Jennifer oversees the recruitment function, implementing

data-driven hiring strategies and process improvements that have resulted in significant cost savings and enhanced efficiency. Prior to this role, Jennifer led recruiting teams for M&T Bank's Commercial and Wealth Management divisions and created and managed successful early career programs.



Jennifer Candee

Global Head of TA Transformation
IMI

Jennifer brings 25+ years of global talent acquisition leadership across multinationals like Cargill, Mondelez, and SABMiller, driving transformation and change. Currently consulting as Global Head of TA Transformation for IMI plc, a FTSE 100 engineering firm, She has led teams across 70+ countries, supporting up to 160K

employees and managing global TA teams of 460. Her cross-industry experience spans FMCG, agriculture, retail, financial services, and telecoms. Outside work, she's a dedicated swim mum to two teenage sons, officiates meets, and enjoys downtime at her Swanage holiday home with her partner Steve.

Our expert contributors



Grant Weinberg

VP Talent Acquisition
Guardant Health

Grant is a seasoned TA and HR operations leader with 20+ years of experience across technology, biotech, and professional services. Renowned for his innovative use of AI and generative tools, he has transformed global recruitment strategies and operational frameworks. His career includes impactful roles at Eikon Therapeutics, TriNet, Gilead Sciences, and Accenture.

Holding a master's in HR management from London Metropolitan University, Grant lives in San Mateo, CA, with his wife Claire, two daughters, and their dog Kenny. A passionate DJ, he balances work with music, performing at venues globally while pursuing his mission to connect talent with opportunity.



Nick Thompson

Founder
TA Decoded

Nick is a multi-award-winning TA and employer brand leader who refuses to accept “business as usual.” In previous roles at organisations including Vodafone, IBM and Hialeon he built future-ready approaches – powered by AI, data, and design thinking – that delivered faster hiring and better candidate experiences. Now, as Founder of TA

Decoded, Nick is on a mission to disrupt the TA tech space, helping vendors stop building “nice-to-haves” and start solving real problems for TA leaders. He works with innovators to shape product roadmaps, sharpen go-to-market strategies, and make every dollar of investment count.

Our expert contributors



Jennifer Mullen

Director of Talent Acquisition, Business Functions
Intuit

Jennifer leads global hiring across Sales, Marketing, Customer Success, HR, Finance, Legal, Compliance, and Corporate Strategy at Intuit. With over a decade at Intuit, Jennifer has shaped international recruitment and internal mobility, driving growth while championing employee well-being. Previously, she held senior talent roles

at Busuu, Expedia, and Yahoo!, building high-performing teams across EMEA and beyond. Known for her strategic vision, collaborative leadership, and passion for people, Jennifer continues to help Intuit power prosperity worldwide by connecting exceptional talent with meaningful opportunities.



Andy Mountney

Global TA leader

Andy is a global Talent Acquisition leader with 25 years' experience building high-performing teams and shaping hiring strategies across EMEA, APAC, and the Americas. He has thrived in fast-paced, tech-first environments at Atlassian and Chainlink Labs, where he built scalable, data-driven TA engines aligned directly to business goals. Andy

specialises in blending direct and RPO models to deliver impact at pace while fostering inclusive, values-driven cultures. Recognised as a forward-thinking advisor and innovator, he is passionate about the future of hiring – linking talent strategy to commercial outcomes and unlocking the full potential of people and organisations.

Our expert contributors



Gareth Bibby

Member Services Manager
APSCo Southeast Asia

With 15+ years in talent acquisition and two decades in Asia Pacific, Gareth offers extensive global expertise. Fluent in Chinese, he has worked in the UK, China, and Singapore across agency and in-house recruitment. His career spans Robert Walters, Michael Page, Randstad, and six years as Director of Talent Acquisition at INSEAD. An MBA

graduate focused on Talent Management, Gareth is committed to advancing recruitment standards. In his current role at APSCo Southeast Asia, he drives the association's growth and influence, leveraging his experience to strengthen the industry and support members across the region.



Sarah Shi

Business Process Expert (BPE) RPO Services APAC
Merck Holding (China)

Sarah joined Merck Holding (China) Co., Ltd. in 2010 and holds a master's degree in human resources. Throughout her career at Merck, she has held four roles within Human Resources: Recruitment Manager, HR Business Partner for Operations in China, and Senior Expert in COE

Recruiting for the APAC region. Since April 2017, she has been serving as the BPE for RPO Services in APAC, where she continues to contribute to the company's HR strategies and initiatives across the Asia-Pacific region.

Our expert contributors



Julie Yeh

Head of Talent Acquisition, APAC
Air Liquide

Julie Yeh is a strategic Talent Acquisition expert with experience leading recruitment transformation across APAC and international markets. As APAC Head of Talent Acquisition at Air Liquide, she drives scalable hiring strategies, digital enablement, and DEI impact across 13-14 markets, achieving measurable results including cost savings

and surpassing diversity benchmarks. Previously, she founded an HR consultancy and led high-performing teams at Michael Page in Singapore and Taiwan. Bilingual in English and Mandarin, Julie is recognised for building future-ready, inclusive TA functions that align people strategies with business growth.



Kristian Warner

Head of Recruitment, APAC and Head of Global Recruitment Operations
GSK

Kristian Warner is a strategic and business-focused talent acquisition leader with deep experience driving operational excellence and transforming recruitment operations. Since joining GSK in 2016, Kristian has led high-impact talent acquisition initiatives, overseeing a team of ~100 recruiters delivering 4,000+ hires annually across 15 markets in the Asia-Pacific region.

He has successfully improved time-to-fill, hiring manager satisfaction, and cost efficiency, while spearheading global projects in recruitment technology and organisational change. Known for his collaborative, people-first approach and data-driven mindset, Kristian is passionate about fostering innovation and empowering teams.

Our expert contributors



Matt Hesketh

Regional Head of Talent Acquisition MENAT
HSBC

Matt Hesketh is a seasoned talent acquisition leader with over 25 years of experience across banking and aviation. As Regional Head of Talent Acquisition for HSBC MENAT, he drives strategic recruitment initiatives to match exceptional talent with impactful careers. Passionate about fostering

growth, Matt has held senior roles at First Abu Dhabi Bank and Etihad Airways, specialising in executive hiring, Emiratization, and global sourcing strategies. Based in Dubai, he thrives on connecting people, ideas, and opportunities to create lasting value.



Dionne Atwill

Founder & CEO
ExecTASocial

Dionne founded ExecTASocial to create a trusted, pitch-free space for Global TA Execs to connect, learn, and collaborate. With years of experience leading global TA teams, she saw the need for a global community built by TA leaders for TA

leaders. Under her leadership, ExecTASocial has grown into a worldwide network hosting peer-led events, learning sessions & platform and partnerships; all focused on elevating the impact of TA.

Our expert contributors



Kait Turnbull

Interim Global Talent Acquisition & Transformation Leader
BP

Kait is a global talent acquisition and transformation leader with extensive experience driving recruitment innovation across EMEA, NAM, APAC, and LATAM. Currently Programme Lead for Technology/AI at BP, she has held impactful roles such as Head of Talent Acquisition at United Utilities and Talent Acquisition Program Director at Wienerberger AG. Kait specialises in optimising

processes, implementing ATS systems, managing MSP programs, and enhancing DE&I initiatives. Known for delivering cost-effective solutions and fostering cultural change, she excels in building scalable recruitment strategies that improve efficiency, reduce agency spend, and elevate candidate and employee experiences globally.



Harjit Kaur

Director, Integrated Talent Solutions
Equinix

Harjit Kaur is a global talent acquisition leader who transforms talent functions into strategic enablers of business growth. As Director of Integrated Talent Solutions at Equinix, she drives initiatives that align people capability with organisational

priorities and deliver measurable impact. Harjit is passionate about creating inclusive cultures and leads with transparency and collaboration, bringing teams along the journey to achieve shared success.

Our expert contributors



Sarah Hanson

Head of Talent Acquisition, International
QBE Insurance

As Head of Talent Acquisition, International at QBE Europe, Sarah has built a high-performing TA function from the ground up. With a global remit spanning the UK, Europe, Canada, Dubai, and Asia, she leads with a diversity-driven approach. Sarah has more than 15 years of experience from EY, Moody's and PIMCO where she delivered

strategic hiring solutions across consulting, financial services, and insurance. A champion of inclusive hiring and continuous improvement, she partners closely with senior leaders to shape innovative, scalable recruitment strategies that elevate both candidate and business hiring experience.



Chapter 1

The evolving landscape of talent acquisition



As the workforce, technology, and macroeconomy continue to reshape the business landscape, talent acquisition (TA) finds itself at a pivotal moment. The leaders interviewed for this guide consistently called out a transformation across the function – a transition that’s not merely cyclical, but seismic. What’s emerging is a TA model that blends market intelligence, orchestration across People functions, and AI-enabled execution, all anchored to commercial outcomes. The message is unambiguous: TA is no longer a transactional operation. It is a strategic engine for growth.

TA is being redefined – or reduced

Across industries and regions, the consensus is clear: the TA function must evolve or risk being sidelined. “TA needs to adapt, evolve – or be reduced. If we’re one-trick ponies, our days are numbered,” said Nick Thompson (TA Decoded). The shift is away from “ticket filling” and toward performance, productivity, retention, and revenue. The future TA leader shows up as a talent advisor, market analyst, and commercial partner – not just a requisition fulfiller.

Kristian Warner (GSK) sees “the recruiter role becoming less transactional and more strategic,” highlighting the need for TA professionals to develop new skills namely change management, data fluency, and the ability to influence and advise business leaders. Grant Weinberg (Guardant Healthcare) put the direction plainly: “TA will be human-centric and AI-enabled. You’re not going to get away from that.” The implication is clear – TA professionals must expand their capability, become more flexible with resources, and adopt new tech and ways of working.

Several leaders warned that capability cuts, without redesign, could result in a downward spiral. “I worry TA functions globally will be cut so far, so deep, recruitment will get pushed to hiring managers – and then it becomes the Wild West,” said Nick Thompson (TA Decoded), referring to potential issues with candidate quality, compliance, and ED&I (equity, diversity and inclusion). The way forward is for TA leaders to reposition the TA function around the value it delivers for the business.

“TA needs to adapt, evolve – or be reduced. If we’re one-trick ponies, our days are numbered”



Nick Thompson
Founder
TA Decoded

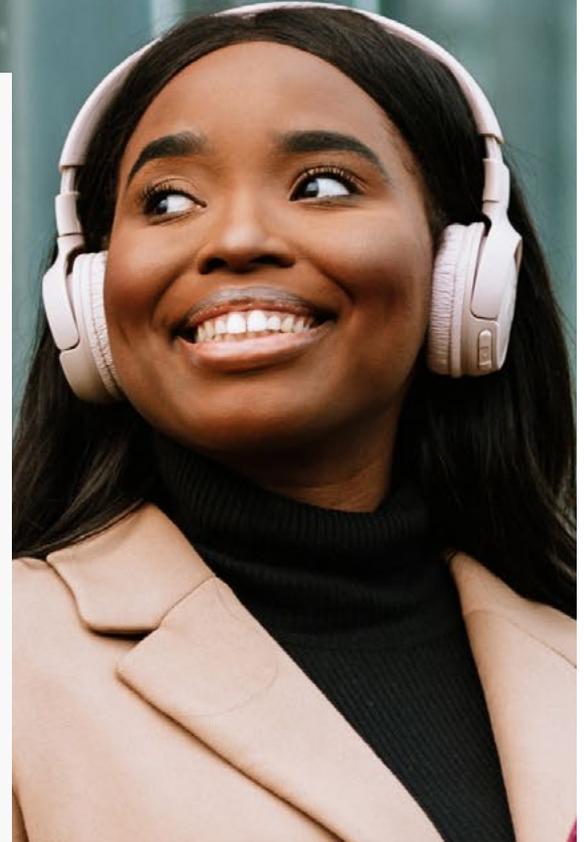
The rise of talent orchestration and integrated talent teams

A clear theme across interviews is the dismantling of silos between TA, HR, and L&D. Leaders described a move toward unified talent strategies where incoming, internal, and outgoing talent are treated as a single system. Harjit Kaur (Equinix) shared an example, where the Talent Acquisition team at Equinix was rebranded as Integrated Talent Solutions.

The shift is from hand-offs to orchestration, with shared data, co-owned outcomes, and an end-to-end view of the employee journey.

“Historically, we’ve always had cut-off points between our roles, and that’s always been detrimental to the candidate experience,” noted Dionne Atwill (ExecTASocial). She anticipates orchestration roles such as Heads of Talent Engineering or Talent Orchestration, charged with coordinating the full lifecycle through data, tools, and human understanding. Julie Yeh (Air Liquide) sees teams increasingly “double-hatting” across adjacent responsibilities, making cross-functional collaboration the norm rather than the exception.

Nick Thompson (TA Decoded) presses the logic further: “I don’t see any reason a really good TA partner couldn’t lead L&D, lead talent, and be that one-stop solution.”



Poll insight

When asked how the relationship between TA and other People functions will evolve, 50% of TA leaders predicted closer cross-team working while 40% expect to see more unified talent strategies.

(source: Robert Walters LinkedIn poll).



The skills-first revolution – real or rhetoric?

The skills-first agenda is widely discussed, but progress on implementing it is slow. Nick Thompson (TA Decoded) is blunt: “It’s been rumbled. It doesn’t work yet.” Andy Mountney adds, “People talk about implementing skills-based hiring — but when I dig in, it’s still experience-based. We’re not really there.” Many organisations still default to familiarity – even when the work has evolved.

One of the main obstacles TA leaders face when trying to move their organisations towards a skills-first approach is resistance from line managers. Hiring managers are often looking to hire from specific companies and struggle to consider talent from different industries or with cross-transferable skills. Jennifer Mullen (Intuit) shared an example: “Once we removed the company name from the CV and just provided skills and experience, the hiring manager saw a great fit. But getting them there takes work.” That “work” includes educating managers, rewriting role profiles into outcomes and skills, and proving fit through structured, job-relevant assessments rather than formal qualifications.

However, progress is visible in pockets. Sarah Hanson (QBE) describes internal talent marketplaces and career hubs that prioritise potential over pedigree, coupled with clearer pathways for lateral moves. Harjit Kaur’s team rebranded to reflect integrated, skills-first thinking,

aligning hiring, development, and mobility to the same taxonomy. Still, the hardest part is shifting mindsets: moving managers from perfect-profile thinking to seeing the candidate’s skills and potential.

“People talk about implementing skills-based hiring — but when I dig in, it’s still experience-based. We’re not really there.”



Andy Mountney
Global TA leader

AI disruption: new tools, new threats

Every interviewee touched on AI's impact – both the opportunity and the risk. Kristian Warner (GSK) underscored the trajectory: “AI is not going to replace recruiters, but recruiters without data fluency and comfort with AI will be replaced.” Teams are already using tools to automate job descriptions, summarise CVs, and generate interview questions. “We use AI to summarise CVs instantly and generate interview questions – it saves time and elevates candidate experience,” said Julie Yeh (Air Liquide).

Harjit Kaur (Equinix) sees the scope widening: “We're experimenting with AI – not just for sourcing, but analytics, assessment, and even talent intelligence.” The gains are tangible: faster research, richer talent maps, and more consistent candidate engagement at scale. The bigger dividend is time – reclaimed hours for strategic thought, stakeholder coaching, and better hiring decisions.

But AI plays on both sides of the market. “AI is being used on both sides of the recruitment equation – and that's going to be disruptive,” Harjit Kaur (Equinix) warned. Leaders cited deep-fake interviews, synthetic profiles, and biased systems as live risks. “We need to stay ahead – identifying any misuse of AI, mitigating biases, and finding the best candidate for the role,” she added. Analyst outlooks for 2025–2026 echo the caution: adoption is racing ahead of governance, and some disillusionment is likely as expectations meet operational reality.



Poll insight

70%

of respondents cited the rise of AI and automation as the most significant change in the TA landscape as we approach 2026.

(source: Robert Walters LinkedIn poll).



Case study – PwC

PwC adopted an AI-based screening tool in 2024 that evaluates CVs, conducts sentiment analysis, and scores candidates on multiple parameters. This cut initial screening time by 45% and increased diversity in hiring, with a 15% rise in candidates from underrepresented groups.

(source: shortlistiq.com).

TA as a business lever, not a cost centre

The most effective TA leaders speak the language of performance, growth, and risk.

“We need to shift from ticket-filling to performance improvement and revenue generation,” said Nick Thompson (TA Decoded). Matt Hesketh’s (HSBC) perspective is that talent leaders must be “real talent authorities” – knowing what the market wants, what competitors are doing, and how workforce intelligence drives strategic advantage. This is the pivot from order-taking to decision-making.

In practice, that means showing how hiring decisions affect the P&L: where teams are based and how much they cost to run, how quickly new hires become productive and start contributing to revenue, whether the right skills are available when needed, and how fast the organisation can bring products or services to market. It also means being definitive about trade-offs – speed versus quality, external hiring versus internal development, centralisation versus local nuance. “My concern is whether TA can focus on what actually drives business outcomes – not just what TA teams think they should do,” said Andy Mountney.

Several leaders voiced concern that TA is being over-cut, with hiring pushed onto managers – a move many see as dangerous for quality, compliance, and equity. Jennifer Candee (IMI) cautioned, “There’s only so far we can cut before recruitment collapses.” Instead of reducing TA to insignificance, the right approach is to preserve a robust core of TA capabilities while leveraging flexible resources to scale up or down according to demand.



Case study - Vodafone

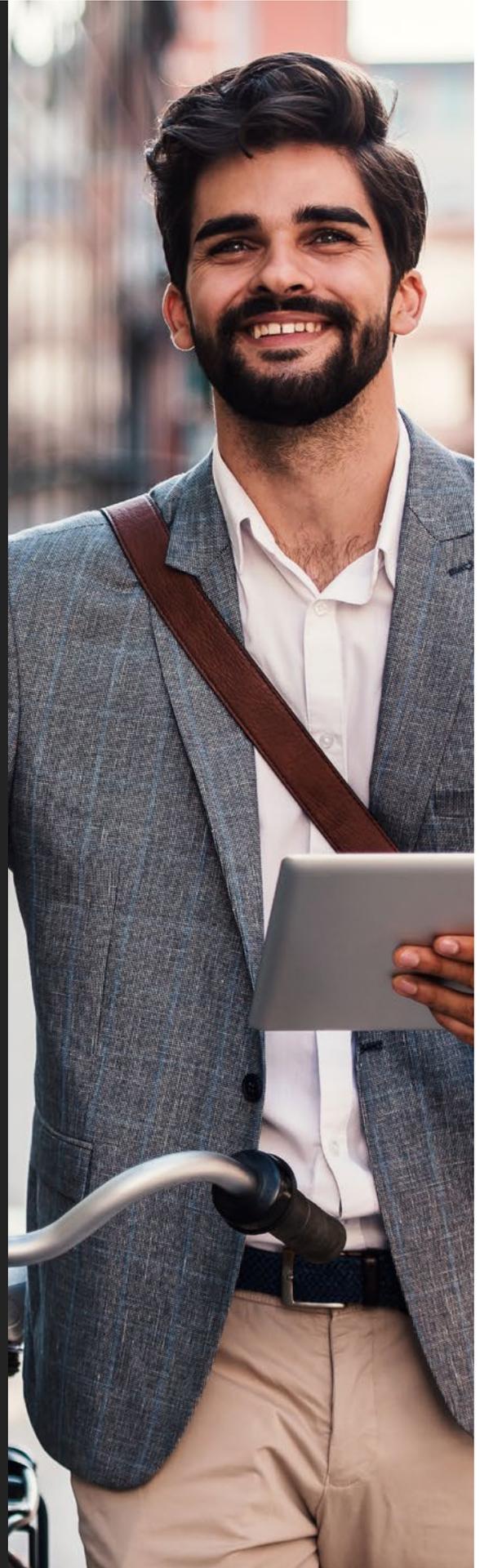
In 2024, Vodafone implemented an AI-driven talent management system with predictive analytics and an internal talent marketplace to better align hiring with business priorities. The initiative increased internal mobility by 25% and cut hiring costs by 30%, directly improving workforce agility and bottom-line performance

(source: shortlistiq.com).

Top concerns for TA leaders today

We asked each interviewee for the single most pressing issue on their mind. Five themes dominated – and they’re deeply interlinked:

- 1 AI misuse and ethical compliance**
Harjit Kaur (Equinix) flagged deep-fake interviews and fake profiles as present-day realities, not hypotheticals. Dionne Atwill (ExecTASocial) echoed the rise of synthetic candidates and stressed the need for vigilance in verification, fairness, and transparency.
- 2 Change fatigue and conventional thinking**
“My biggest concern? Conventional thinking. We’ve always done it this way, so we continue,” said Matt Hesketh (HSBC). Many leaders cited organisational inertia – legacy processes and beliefs that lag behind current market conditions.
- 3 Data fluency and tech literacy gaps**
“Recruiters who don’t develop digital fluency will fall behind,” warned Kristian Warner (GSK). Leaders are investing in skills, tooling, and change management – but capability building must keep pace with adoption.
- 4 Misalignment between TA and business goals**
Andy Mountney challenged teams to prioritise work that moves commercial needles, not just TA vanity metrics. This calls for clearer lines of sight between hiring choices and business outcomes.
- 5 Over-cutting amid uncertainty**
TA leaders worry that short-term savings may trigger long-term costs: poor hires, compliance risk, slower growth, and damaged candidate experience, especially if business leaders rush to make cuts before AI tools have been properly tested and implemented into recruitment processes.



The macro undercurrents TA must navigate

TA's evolution isn't happening in a vacuum. Leaders highlighted external forces reshaping talent decisions:

- Tight labour mobility and varied immigration settings are increasing the premium on local and returning talent, changing sourcing strategies and EVP positioning.
- Location strategy is in flux as return-to-office expectations, cost pressures, and political dynamics shift candidate preferences and employer options.
- Budget constraints and productivity mandates are forcing sharper choices: where to centralise, where to automate, and where to invest in capability.
- Early careers pipelines are uneven; some firms are reducing graduate intakes even as the need to build future skills intensifies.
- Candidates are scrutinising their potential employer's values, flexibility, and social impact – not as add-ons, but as decision criteria alongside pay and role design.

In increasingly complex hiring environments, TA leaders need to move beyond recruitment to develop broader fluency across geopolitics, labour economics, compliance, ethics, and change leadership.

Early careers and future skills pipelines: building tomorrow's talent today

One of the quieter, but deeply consequential, threads running through the interviews was the evolving role of early careers in the future of work. Several TA leaders flagged the need to revisit how graduate, apprentice, and entry-level talent is sourced, shaped, and sustained – not only as a feeder for workforce planning, but as a strategic lever for skills-first transformation.

Julie Yeh (Air Liquide) emphasised the importance of real-world learning cycles and future skills development over brand-name degrees. “We’ve started to look more at potential, mindset, and adaptability – how someone learns – rather than where they’ve studied. That’s becoming increasingly important as the work keeps changing.” The shift isn’t just philosophical. Harjit Kaur (Equinix) sees early careers as a critical part of talent architecture: “We’re rethinking graduate schemes entirely. The question isn’t ‘where do we place them?’ but ‘what ecosystem do we build so they succeed?’ That means line manager coaching, community-building, and real exposure to strategic work.”

To move from pipeline to impact, TA leaders are embedding future skills into the design of early careers programmes: data literacy, digital collaboration, and systems thinking are replacing traditional training modules.

Sarah Hanson (QBE) described her team's pivot to pair early talent with internal mentors across business units, focusing not just on onboarding but cross-functional capability building.

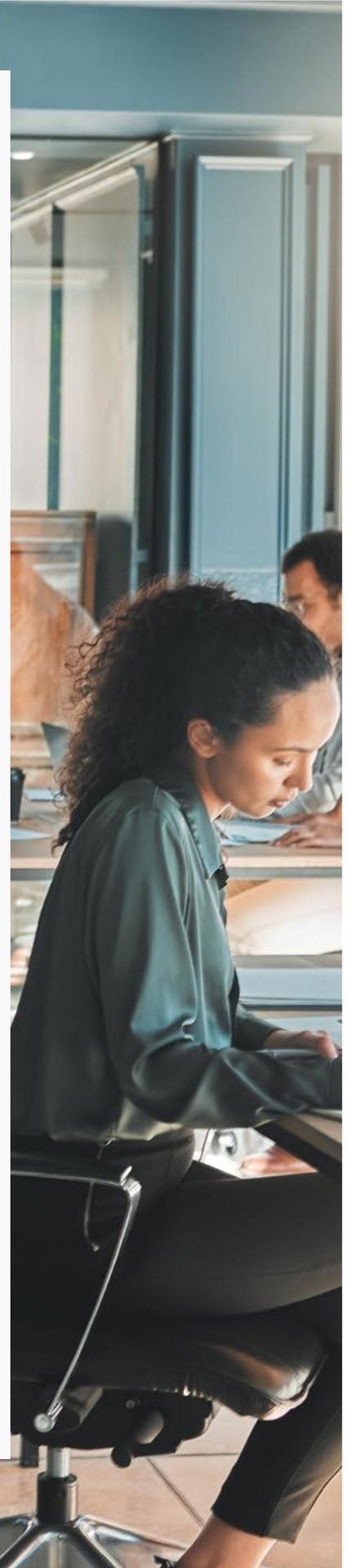
At a structural level, this shift demands tighter integration between TA, HR, and L&D. “You can’t talk about future skills in isolation,” warned Dionne Atwill (ExecTASocial). “TA, learning, and internal mobility all have to share a skills-language – otherwise we’re just talking past each other.”



What good looks like

High performing TA functions navigating the evolving landscape typically:

- 1 Reframe TA's value in commercial terms** – linking hiring speed, quality, retention, and internal mobility directly to revenue, cost, and growth.
- 2 Act as strategic advisors** – influencing workforce planning, location strategy, and role design with market intelligence and talent risk insights.
- 3 Integrate across the talent ecosystem** – unifying external hiring, internal mobility, skills development, and succession into one coordinated plan.
- 4 Adopt a skills-first mindset** – using shared taxonomies, structured assessments, and manager education to prioritise potential over pedigree.
- 5 Leverage AI as an enabler** – embedding tools to automate low-value tasks, enhance decision-making, and improve candidate experience, while governing for ethics and bias.
- 6 Protect and flex capability** – maintaining a resilient core TA team and scaling resources up or down without compromising quality, compliance, or equity.
- 7 Invest in early careers strategically** – designing programmes around learning agility, future skills, and ecosystems of support that accelerate progression.
- 8 Build credibility through evidence** – using data-driven narratives, not opinion, to influence leaders and secure TA's role as a business lever.





Key takeaways

1

TA must earn – and use – its strategic ‘seat at the table’. Deeply understand your business and the talent marketplace you’re operating in. Show up with market authority, business acumen, and clarity on trade-offs.

2

AI is an amplifier, not an autopilot. Operationalise it where it saves time and supports quality decision-making; govern it properly to ensure it’s being used ethically.

3

Skills-first is the right direction. Make it real through shared taxonomies, structured, job-relevant assessments, and manager mindset shifts.

4

Unify the talent system. Replace hand-offs with coordination across TA, HR, and L&D to improve outcomes and experiences.

5

Protect capability, prove value. Build a resilient core team, flex around demand, and measure TA by business impact – not just process speed or other TA vanity metrics.

Chapter 2

Embracing agility and skills-first models



From intent to impact: closing the skills-first execution gap

As AI and automation continue to reshape how work gets done, leading TA teams are pushing beyond legacy, role-based structures toward more agile, skills-first models. The goal is faster redeployment of internal talent as markets shift, broader and more diverse talent pools, and stickier internal careers.

LinkedIn's latest global trends indicate that roughly three in four recruiting leaders now prioritise skills over traditional qualifications, yet fewer than one in five employers have embedded skills-first at scale¹. That's the terrain TA must now navigate – one of strong intent but patchy execution.

The reality on the ground

Across industries and regions, most organisations are experimenting with skills-first rather than operating at scale. The early work looks like rewriting role profiles into outcomes and must-have skills, setting up internal career hubs and piloting task-based assessments. "I'm most interested in looking at task-based hiring because tasks are going to change with the advent of AI," said Dionne Atwill (ExecTASocial). "I'd much rather look at it in situ – how do you deal with the task that you're going to be asked to do?"

The experts we interviewed acknowledged the gap between intent and execution. "I don't think we're seeing that much evidence of it yet... at the moment it's largely a HR concept versus something that businesses are embedding in their talent/workforce strategies," said Kristian Warner (GSK). For Nick Thompson (TA Decoded), the shortfall is sharper still: "I can't find a case study anywhere where anyone has really, truly, thoroughly done this..."

hiring managers are nowhere near on board with that train of thought."

Others are experimenting with pragmatic steps. At Aspen, Jennifer Turner says, "We are building out role profiles and we're focused on developing an agile workforce which will help us get to where we need to be in the future."

"I don't think we're seeing that much evidence of it yet... at the moment it's largely a HR concept versus something that businesses are embedding in their talent/workforce strategies,"



Kristian Warner
Head of Recruitment, APAC
and Head of Global
Recruitment Operations
GSK

Why it matters – beyond hiring

Skills-first is not a branding exercise; it's an operating model built to match people to work fluidly – inside as much as outside the organisation. That's why internal mobility is important. When skills are valued more than background, it's easier to make lateral career moves, project work becomes more noticeable, and talent can be quickly reassigned when priorities shift.

Deloitte's recent Human Capital research highlights that internal talent marketplaces can accelerate redeployment and support measurable retention gains in critical skill areas – showing a direct link between skills visibility, mobility, and organisational resilience.

The macro context raises the stakes: the World Economic Forum estimates that 44% of workers' skills will be disrupted within five years, making agility in learning and in quickly deploying people to the right work less an advantage than a necessity.

The organisations that surface potential, build capability, and move people quickly will outpace those still searching for perfect-fit resumes.

Unlocking mobility: internal development as strategy

More than half of the interviewees pointed to talent mobility and project-based assignments as cornerstones of their evolving models. Mobility is no longer just seen as administrative work; it's a way to build skills, keep employees, and quickly move talent where it's needed.

QBE is one company that is investing in a skills-first approach having recently completed a global, organisation-wide job architecture project focused on mapping employees' skills, with plans to launch a comprehensive internal talent marketplace by the end of 2025.

"We're creating an internal career hub so our people can pursue gigs and opportunities to develop their careers and grow their skills," says Sarah Hanson (QBE). "By focusing on skills rather than roles, we're hoping to be able to adapt quicker to changing needs and the deployment of talent."

Similarly, Jennifer Candee (IMI) is piloting an internal projects marketplace as part of a talent mobility programme. "For us it's about transferring the skills we have within our organisation across our five different sectors, across functions and potentially geographies so we can cross-pollinate our talent much better."

"We're creating an internal career hub so our people can pursue gigs and opportunities to develop their careers and grow their skills. By focusing on skills rather than roles, we're hoping to be able to adapt quicker to changing needs and the deployment of talent."



Sarah Hanson
Head of Talent Acquisition,
International
QBE Insurance



Case study – IBM

In 2024, IBM expanded its internal AI-powered talent marketplace, enabling employees to match to projects and roles based on skills rather than job titles. The platform accelerated redeployment during business shifts by 30% and boosted retention in critical skill areas by 20%

(source: [2024 Global Mainframe Skills Report](#)).

Internal skills marketplaces make internal gigs, projects, and roles discoverable to all, replacing hidden networks and manager-by-manager moves. Kait Turnbull (BP) pointed to organisations like IBM and Unilever launching internal marketplaces to evolve talent dynamically leading to faster redeployment and higher retention in critical skill areas.

Jennifer Candee (IMI) adds: "The rise of internal mobility programmes helps increase retention and hires from within, even if you don't have complete skills taxonomies. You're testing and finding different skills or raising the skills of your people through talent mobility. That I can get behind a bit more – it's not easy, but it's easier to do than creating a full-blown skills marketplace and it allows for more agility."

LinkedIn's data suggests that organisations leaning into skills see materially higher internal fill rates over time – a leading indicator of a healthier, more resilient talent system.

"The rise of internal mobility programmes helps increase retention and hires from within, even if you don't have complete skills taxonomies. You're testing and finding different skills or raising the skills of your people through talent mobility. That I can get behind a bit more – it's not easy, but it's easier to do than creating a full-blown skills marketplace and it allows for more agility."



Jennifer Candee
Global Head of TA
Transformation
IMI



The workforce is evolving: why skills-first answers the call

Today's workforce is more diverse in ambition, background, and working style than ever before. Early-in-career professionals increasingly seek purpose, variety, and skill growth over promotions. Skills-first models offer the flexibility and transparency they crave.

"People are not necessarily looking for the title anymore... people are more about what's the scope? who am I going to be working with? what do I get to see?," says Julie Yeh (Air Liquide). Jennifer Turner (Aspen) agrees, "The new generation coming into the workforce wants to explore different areas – they want to explore what their capabilities are and learn new skills."

What's more, the skills-first model can unlock more inclusive hiring. By removing filters like degree or company background, TA can surface diverse talent with fresh perspectives and strong potential. The same applies to gig talent, fractional workers, and neurodiverse candidates – all of which require more agile, skills-led engagement models. But it takes commitment – to build fair assessment processes, validate skills through job-relevant tasks, and ensure transparency throughout the candidate journey.

"The new generation coming into the workforce wants to explore different areas – they want to explore what their capabilities are and learn new skills."



Jennifer Turner
Vice President
Talent Acquisition Partner
and Global Lead
Aspen Insurance Group



What good looks like

High-performing TA teams adopting agility and skills-first models typically:

- 1** Operate from a live, enterprise-wide skills taxonomy linked to workforce planning and talent mobility.
- 2** Translate role profiles into clear outcomes and must-have skills, with assessment methods grounded in real-world tasks.
- 3** Run AI-enabled internal talent marketplaces or career hubs that make gigs, projects, and roles visible to all employees.
- 4** Track internal mobility rates, redeployment speed, and diversity of internal hires as core TA performance metrics.
- 5** Partner with business leaders to forecast emerging skills needs and proactively build internal capability.
- 6** Embed fair, transparent, and task-based assessment processes that remove unnecessary credential filters.
- 7** Integrate mobility into career development, ensuring employees see clear pathways to grow skills and explore new areas.



Key takeaways

- 1 Move from pilots to scale** – embed skills-first principles into job architecture, assessment, and mobility processes.
- 2 Make skills visible** – invest in taxonomies, marketplaces, and data systems that surface capability across the workforce.
- 3 Link agility to business outcomes** – measure redeployment speed, retention in critical skill areas, and diversity gains.
- 4 Design for inclusion** – remove degree and background filters, validate skills through relevant tasks, and open access to underrepresented talent pools.
- 5 Secure leadership buy-in** – engage hiring managers early to align on skills-based decision-making and mobility as a strategic lever.
- 6 Treat internal mobility as strategy** – use projects, gigs, and lateral moves to build capability and resilience ahead of market shifts.



Chapter 3

Leveraging technology and AI in talent acquisition

The tech powered TA era

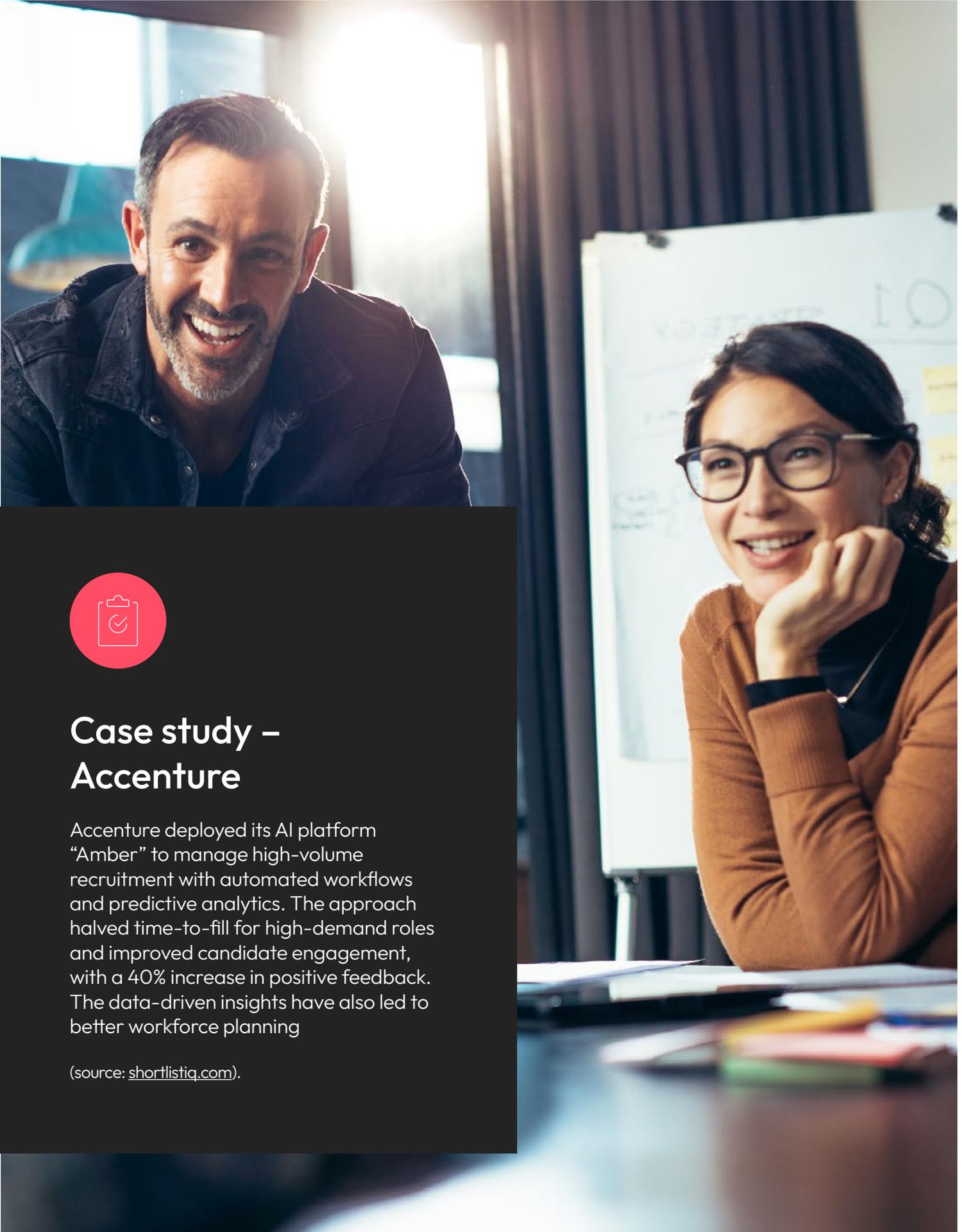
AI adoption in HR is accelerating at pace. Gartner reports that the share of HR leaders actively planning or deploying generative AI jumped from 19% in mid-2023 to 61% by January 2025. Deloitte's research reinforces the momentum: 91% of business leaders expect productivity to rise as a result of generative AI, with the biggest gains coming from automation, hyper-personalisation, and faster decision-making. For TA leaders, the opportunity is clear – to free recruiters from transactional tasks so they can focus on strategic, high-value work that directly impacts business outcomes.

As Kait Turnbull (BP) puts it, “Forward-looking organisations that prioritise TA and embrace digital platforms and AI tech stacks – they’re the ones that will be on the front foot.” Matt Hesketh (HSBC) adds, “You have to know how to use your tech and how to use it in real time.” The challenge – and the opportunity – now lies in building AI fluency within the TA function.

“Forward-looking organisations that prioritise TA and embrace digital platforms and AI tech stacks – they’re the ones that will be on the front foot.”



Kait Turnbull
Interim Global Talent Acquisition
& Transformation Leader
BP



Case study – Accenture

Accenture deployed its AI platform “Amber” to manage high-volume recruitment with automated workflows and predictive analytics. The approach halved time-to-fill for high-demand roles and improved candidate engagement, with a 40% increase in positive feedback. The data-driven insights have also led to better workforce planning

(source: shortlistiq.com).

From tools to transformation

Across industries, leading TA teams are embedding AI into the heart of their workflows. Automated job description creation, skills-based matching, talent intelligence dashboards, and AI-driven candidate engagement tools are no longer experimental – they're becoming standard practice.

The difference between early adopters and true transformers is a focus on business impact. "TA leaders are really good at buying shiny new tech, but we first need to spend time understanding what problems we are solving. Forget about what platform X or Y can do and instead ask what problems does your organisation have? Where are the pain points that need addressing?" advises Nick Thompson (TA Decoded).

Rather than chasing the latest on-trend piece of tech, high-performing teams are selecting tools that solve specific business problems and deliver measurable ROI. At GSK, for example, AI-driven skills assessment tools are helping recruiters identify potential and predict future performance. "We're developing these tools to better understand the skills needed for success in specific roles and to identify candidates who are likely to excel and move up into bigger roles in the future." says Kristian Warner (GSK).

Robert Walters LinkedIn poll data shows an even split in how TA leaders are building capability: 47% are equipping teams through formal AI tool training, while another 47% are encouraging curiosity – signalling that mindset is as important as skillset. At QBE, there's a focus on both formal training in the use of Copilot and building a culture of experimentation that gives recruiters the freedom to experiment, share learnings, and refine processes together.

In the end, transformation happens when AI stops being just a tool and becomes a capability that is cultivated – one that solves real problems, delivers measurable impact, and keeps TA teams ahead of the curve.



Case study – L'Oréal

L'Oréal introduced its AI chatbot "Mya" to automate first-round interviews and candidate Q&A, freeing recruiters to focus on strategic hiring. Within a year, time-to-hire dropped by 33% and candidate satisfaction scores rose significantly due to faster, more personalised interactions

(source: shortlistiq.com).

"We're developing these tools to better understand the skills needed for success in specific roles and to identify candidates who are likely to excel and move up into bigger roles in the future."



Kristian Warner
Head of Recruitment, APAC
and Head of Global
Recruitment Operations
GSK

The new TA leader skillset

The rise of AI is reshaping what it means to lead in TA. Data and AI fluency now sit alongside stakeholder influence, change management, and strategic workforce planning as essential capabilities.

In our LinkedIn poll, 46% of respondents identified data and AI fluency as the top future skill for TA leaders, closely followed by 43% citing strategic workforce planning. Leaders are expected not only to interpret complex datasets but to translate them into compelling narratives that influence business decisions. “You need to be somebody who is data savvy and really good at storytelling,” advises Sarah Hanson (QBE). Jennifer Candee (IMI) agrees, saying it’s not enough to merely share interesting and informative data – instead TA leaders need to “get underneath what the data means, what insights does it give us and what is critically important for business leaders to know?”

Additionally, many of the TA leaders we interviewed spoke about a shift in mindset and attitude that differentiates the TA leader of the future. “We have to be bold, we have to be out there and we have to experiment,” shared Grant Weinberg (Guardant Health). Sarah Shi (Merck) echoed that sentiment: “Talent acquisition professionals need to think strategically and embrace innovation. It’s about working seamlessly with AI agents and tools, stepping into a project manager role to drive progress and elevate human potential.”

The TA leader of the future is both a strategist and an innovator – skilled with data, open to experimentation, and able to leverage technology for real business results.

“Talent acquisition professionals need to think strategically and embrace innovation. It's about working seamlessly with AI agents and tools, stepping into a project manager role to drive progress and elevate human potential.”



Sarah Shi
Business Process Expert (BPE)
RPO Services APAC
Merck Holding (China)

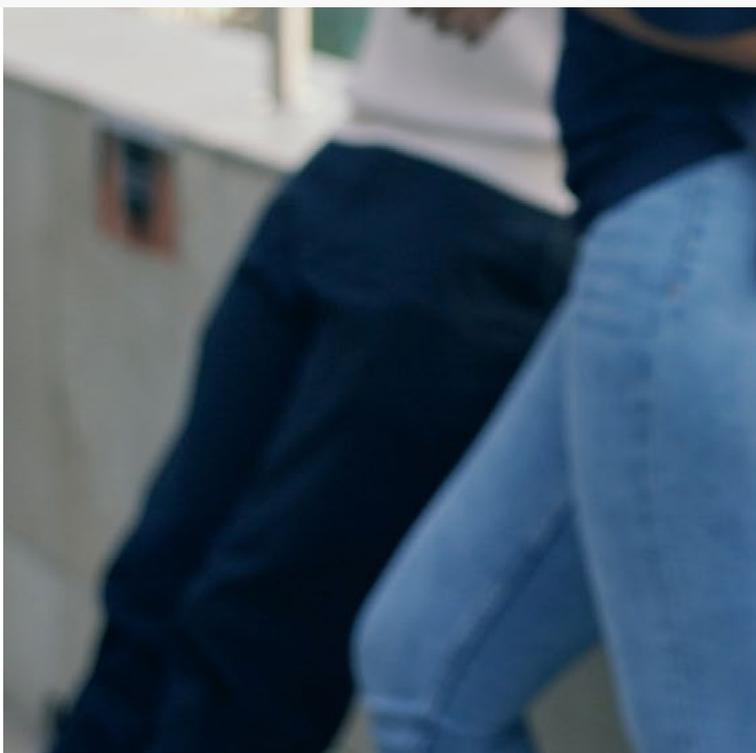


Ethical AI in practice

With AI now embedded on both sides of the hiring equation – candidates and employers – the conversation has shifted from if to how it should be used. Ethical considerations are no longer optional – they’re central to maintaining candidate trust and protecting employer brand.

Embedding fairness, transparency, and bias mitigation into AI-driven processes is critical. This means communicating openly with candidates about where and how AI is used, holding vendors accountable for ethical standards, and ensuring compliance with evolving regulations.

Nick Thompson (TA Decoded) described his approach simply: “We want to be totally open and honest with candidates about how we’re using AI... and we want them to use AI ethically as well.” This kind of transparency builds trust: candidates and managers should know when and how AI was used in a decision, and there should be a documented route to challenge or review outcomes.



“We want to be totally open and honest with candidates about how we’re using AI... and we want them to use AI ethically as well.”



Nick Thompson
Founder
TA Decoded



Leaders are responding with clear policies on what is automated, what is augmented, and what remains human, alongside identity verification and interview integrity checks proportionate to risk. Jennifer Mullen outlines Intuit's approach, "Our guidelines say AI cannot be used to assess anyone... we're using it in all parts of the recruitment process, apart from where it can make a decision."

Balancing automation with the human touch is equally important. AI can streamline processes, but it cannot replace the authenticity and empathy that define a great candidate experience. As Gareth Bibby (APSCo) states, "The real value-add is the human touch. You need a person to connect with that candidate, build the relationship, sell the brand and EVP, and really dig down into the candidate's desires, motivation and experience. AI is the tool but TA professionals bring the human element."

"The real value add is the human touch. You need a person to connect with that candidate, build the relationship, sell the brand and EVP, and really dig down into the candidate's desires, motivation and experience. AI is the tool but TA professionals bring the human element."



Gareth Bibby
Member Services Manager
APSCo Southeast Asia





What good looks like

- 1** AI tools embedded in end-to-end workflows, with ROI tracked against agreed business KPIs.
- 2** Transparent AI usage policies communicated to all stakeholders, with candidate-facing explanations at key touchpoints.
- 3** Recruiters proficient in both technical operation and ethical application of AI, supported by ongoing skills refreshers.
- 4** Candidate experience and quality-of-hire metrics maintained or improved following automation.



Key takeaways

- 1 Diagnose before you deploy** – choose technology to solve defined business problems with measurable outcomes.
- 2 Raise AI fluency** – blend structured training with a culture that rewards curiosity, experimentation, and shared learning.
- 3 Embed ethics from the start** – set transparent policies, audit regularly, and require vendors to meet agreed ethical standards.
- 4 Balance speed with trust** – measure candidate experience and quality of hire alongside efficiency and cost savings.
- 5 Lead with insight** – turn data into compelling narratives that influence stakeholders and align AI adoption with long-term workforce strategy.

Chapter 4

The rise of the non-permanent workforce

The global shift toward agile talent models

The global workforce is shifting towards greater flexibility. Economic uncertainty, rapid technological change, and evolving worker expectations are prompting organisations to rethink how they access skills. For many TA leaders, the answer lies in a blended model – combining permanent employees with contractors, consultants, and gig workers to meet changing business needs.

This is no longer just a stopgap for urgent vacancies. When done well, non-permanent workforce strategies can unlock innovation, speed, and resilience – but they also demand new approaches to planning, integration, and compliance.

Global data underscores the scale of this shift. The International Labour Organisation estimates that approximately 16% of the global workforce is now in temporary or fixed-term employment, with the proportion highest in professional and technical roles.

Why organisations are turning to non-perm talent

Across our interviews, leaders described a decisive move toward contingent hiring as a strategic choice rather than a reactive measure. For Nick Thompson (TA Decoded), the direction of travel is clear: “I think we’ll see more non-permanent workers globally – and we should be able to target skills rather than job titles.”

That shift is already underway at QBE, where Sarah Hanson explained that “right now we use a blended workforce – full-time employees alongside temps and contractors – and I think that will increase to give us more agility.”

At HSBC, Matt Hesketh described contingent talent as “an important part of our community” that has always been, and will continue to be, integral to how the organisation operates. He states: “I know of professionals who are the Ronaldo’s or Messi’s in their particular field, but they won’t come back into the permanent workforce,” showing why organisations need to offer non-permanent work options in order to access top talent.



“I know of professionals who are the Ronaldo’s or Messi’s in their particular field, but they won’t come back into the permanent workforce.”



Matt Hesketh
Regional Head of Talent
Acquisition MENAT
HSBC



Integrating non-perm talent into workforce planning

The most effective TA functions are embedding contingent workforce planning into their total talent strategies – forecasting demand, aligning with procurement and HR, and ensuring cultural integration.

Harjit Kaur (Equinix) shared, “We are building a two-to-three-year road map as part of our workforce planning... we are really looking at our blended workforce that includes our consultants and our contingent labour.” Deloitte notes that companies integrating contingent workers into a unified workforce strategy report notable gains in project delivery effectiveness – reinforcing the value of integrating these workers into long-term planning.

At QBE, Sarah Hanson noted that leadership discussions now explore whether more roles could be structured as projects, with people moving between assignments in a way that mirrors consulting models.

In APAC, Julie Yeh (Air Liquide), said her team is providing flexible opportunities to “people who want to come back after retirement – especially in Japan and Taiwan, we see a lot of that. We are happy to give them a contract position which gives them the balance and flexibility they’re looking for.” Matt Hesketh (HSBC) takes a similar approach, “We tap into alumni and retirees who know our products inside out and invite them back for specific projects.”

Another key aspect our interviewees raised is the importance of knowledge transfer from contractors to permanent employees prior to a project’s

completion. Nick Thompson (TA Decoded) says, “We ensure our contractors know that part of the project is to ensure they leave skills, competencies and know-how so the organisation can keep the project running in the future.”

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Nick Thompson
Founder
TA Decoded

Common challenges

1. Compliance and legal complexity

The World Employment Confederation notes that 41% of companies cite navigating local labour laws as their top barrier to scaling contingent hiring. Harjit Kaur (Equinix) agrees, “The biggest challenge is compliance and local regulations...we need to really make sure we are staying abreast of all the local regulations on contingent labour.” Similarly, Kait Turnbull (BP) advises, “Organisations need to ensure that they are compliant with legal and governance requirements when integrating non-permanent workers. This includes adhering to data privacy laws and ensuring that there is a human element in the hiring process.”

2. Cultural integration

Staffing Industry Analysts (SIA) reports that contingent workers who feel disconnected from company culture are more likely to disengage, impacting productivity and retention. Nick Thompson (TA Decoded) observed that “companies often keep non-permanent workers at arm’s length. It’s like saying you’re a key and critical part to our organisation, but don’t join our team calls because you’re somewhere else.”

The TA leaders we interviewed stressed the importance of providing contingent workers with the same high-quality onboarding as permanent employees. As Nick Thompson (TA Decoded) emphasised, “Contractors need to be onboarded in the same way as a permanent employee... not just the what and the when, but the why.” Sarah Hanson (QBE) agrees, “We focus on giving contingent workers a really positive and consistent onboarding experience so they too can build a career.”



Poll insight

When asked about the biggest challenges businesses face when integrating non-permanent talent into workforce planning – 61% of TA leaders said culture and belonging

(source: Robert Walters LinkedIn poll).

“Organisations need to ensure that they are compliant with legal and governance requirements when integrating non-permanent workers. This includes adhering to data privacy laws and ensuring that there is a human element in the hiring process.”



Kait Turnbull
Interim Global Talent Acquisition
& Transformation Leader
BP



3. Process efficiency and speed

Streamlining procurement, contracting and onboarding processes is a challenge for many companies but vitally important to attract top non-permanent talent and avoid losing quality contractors to faster-moving companies. Gareth Bibby (APSCo) warns companies with lengthy processes: “You’ve probably lost the person by the time you come back with that contract because someone who was faster snaps them up.”

He adds, “Big companies often require a mountain of compliance reports when hiring fractional interim workers, which can be a real burden for independent freelancers. To access agile talent, companies need to simplify these processes. I’d advise TA teams to sit down and work with their legal, HR and finance departments to get a library of contracts for different types of fractional workers in place so that they can easily and quickly onboard contingent workers.”

4. Regional maturity

According to Kristian Warner (GSK), “In much of APAC, non-traditional work is still rare – outside of Australia and New Zealand, gig and contract work can feel like a foreign concept.” Singapore-based Harjit Kaur (Equinix) agrees, “In certain markets there’s still a preference on being a regular employee which can make it difficult to find contingent labour.” In contrast, in the UAE, Matt Hesketh’s (HSBC) experience is that “a rich gig economy is emerging – many people want fractional work and to be part of the gig economy.” These regional differences pose a challenge for TA leaders and need to be considered during workforce planning.

“Big companies often require a mountain of compliance reports when hiring fractional interim workers, which can be a real burden for independent freelancers. To access agile talent, companies need to simplify these processes.”



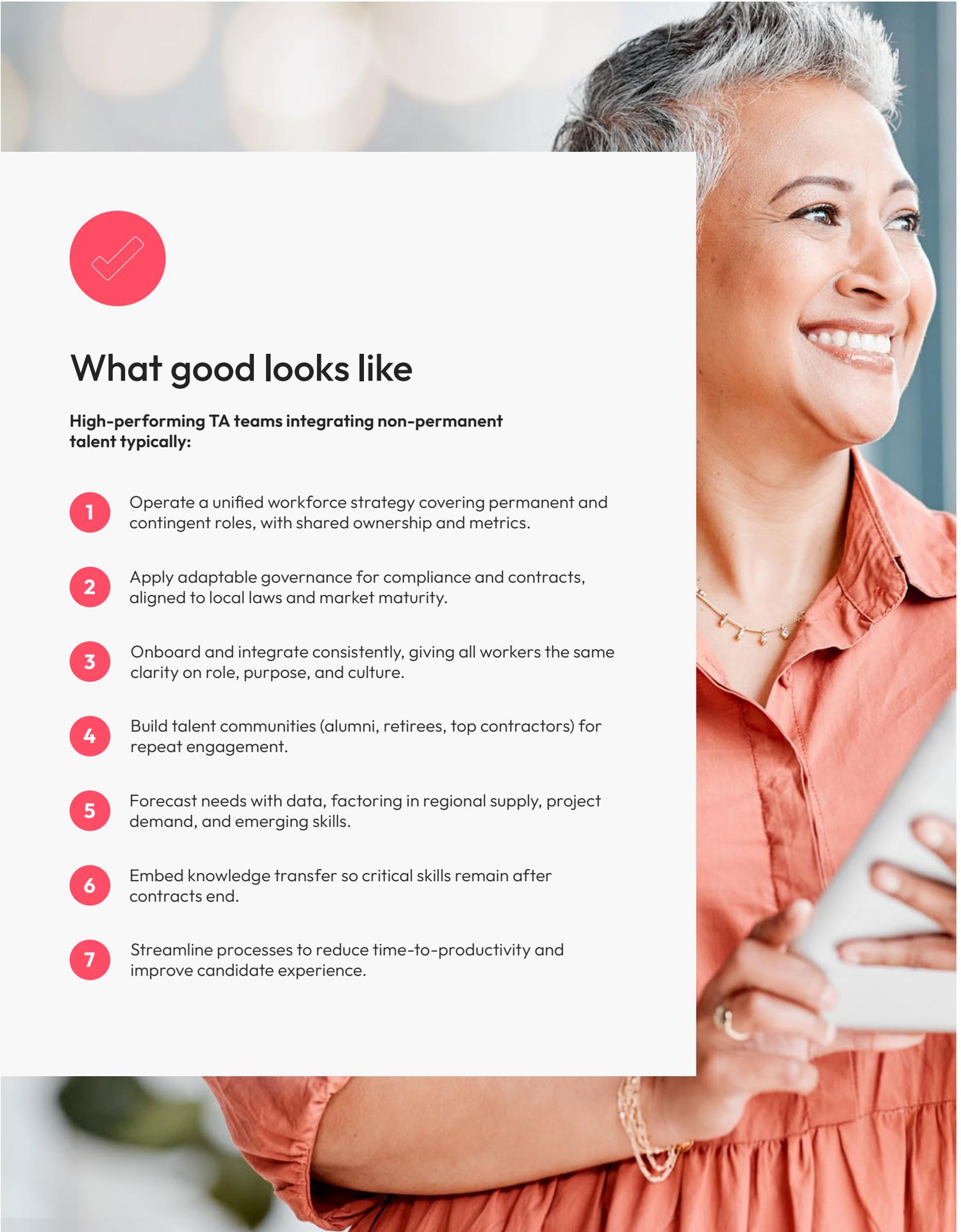
Gareth Bibby
Member Services Manager
APSCo Southeast Asia



What good looks like

High-performing TA teams integrating non-permanent talent typically:

- 1** Operate a unified workforce strategy covering permanent and contingent roles, with shared ownership and metrics.
- 2** Apply adaptable governance for compliance and contracts, aligned to local laws and market maturity.
- 3** Onboard and integrate consistently, giving all workers the same clarity on role, purpose, and culture.
- 4** Build talent communities (alumni, retirees, top contractors) for repeat engagement.
- 5** Forecast needs with data, factoring in regional supply, project demand, and emerging skills.
- 6** Embed knowledge transfer so critical skills remain after contracts end.
- 7** Streamline processes to reduce time-to-productivity and improve candidate experience.





Key takeaways

- 1 Treat contingent talent as a strategic asset** – integral to innovation, agility, and resilience, not just a stopgap for urgent vacancies.
- 2 Integrate contingent workforce planning into total talent strategies**, aligning with business goals, procurement cycles, and regional market realities.
- 3 Proactively address compliance, onboarding, and engagement** to maximise value and minimise risk, adapting approaches for different geographies and worker types.
- 4 Streamline processes and build trusted supplier relationships** to secure quality talent quickly, without compromising compliance or candidate experience.
- 5 Foster an inclusive culture** where all workers – regardless of contract type – feel valued, connected, and able to contribute fully.
- 6 Leverage data and insights** to continuously improve contingent workforce performance, measure ROI, and inform future workforce design.



Chapter 5

Leadership and strategic alignment in talent acquisition

The TA leader as a business leader

The role of the TA leader has shifted decisively from operational delivery to strategic influence. As Andy Mountney observes, “Seats at tables aren’t given, they’re earned” – and earning them means showing up as a business leader first, TA leader second. This requires reframing TA’s value in commercial terms. Nick Thompson (TA Decoded) recalls, “At my former organisation, we stopped talking about time to apply and started calculating the revenue gained by hiring a day faster – it was a significant figure and it got me into the C-suite without even asking.” Harjit Kaur (Equinix) reinforces the point: “TA leaders need to move beyond the traditional filling of roles... understand the business priorities and then help in shaping the talent strategy.”

Gartner’s 2024 HR Priorities research found that 62% of HR leaders cite talent retention and turnover as the most significant obstacle to achieving their strategic priorities¹ – underscoring the heightened pressure on TA to deliver hires who stick and perform. In this environment, TA leaders who can link talent outcomes directly to revenue, cost, and growth are the ones who gain lasting influence. Dionne Atwill (ExecTASocial) puts it plainly: “Impact of hire resonates with a CEO far more than quality of hire. Quality of hire measures the quality of a process and is not a standardised measurement across companies. Impact of hire, however, is a new methodology being developed by ExecTASocial to provide a more direct and measurable connection between hiring decisions and business outcomes.”

“At my former organisation, we stopped talking about time to apply and started calculating the revenue gained by hiring a day faster – it was a significant figure and it got me into the C-suite without even asking.”



Nick Thompson
Founder
TA Decoded

Positioning TA as a strategic partner

Strategic alignment starts with understanding – and speaking – the language of the business. Harjit Kaur (Equinix) stresses that TA must be a “co-architect of business strategy, not just an order taker”, bringing market intelligence and workforce insights to the table. Jennifer Candee (IMI) frames it as being both “the bird and the frog” – able to see the long-term strategy from above while staying close enough to operational realities to make it happen. Matt Hesketh (HSBC) adds that credibility comes from mastery of the market: “You have to be a real talent authority – know what competitors are up to and what talent wants.”

Research from McKinsey shows that organisations integrating workforce planning into business planning are 66% more likely to exceed financial targets² – a clear signal that TA’s influence grows when it’s tied directly to business performance. Dionne Atwill (ExecTASocial) underscores the point: “If you want to be a strategic partner, you have to understand the business inside out – not just TA. That means knowing the numbers, the market, and the levers that drive growth.”

Together, these perspectives form a clear mandate: to be seen – and valued – as a strategic partner, TA leaders must combine deep business fluency with a dual-lens view of strategy and execution, using insight to influence decisions that shape the organisation’s future.

Advice for emerging TA leaders

The leaders we spoke to offered pragmatic, sometimes hard-edged advice. Grant Weinberg (Guardant Health) is direct: “The business should respect the TA team and this starts with being more definite and less accommodating for customisations.” Jennifer Turner (Aspen) encourages new leaders to “feel your value and show your value,” while Sarah Hanson (QBE) emphasises curiosity, relationship building, and listening to candidates and hiring managers as primary sources of insight. Julie Yeh (Air Liquide) leaves emerging TA leaders with a challenge and an invitation: “Don’t be afraid to just sit at the table. Speak with confidence – with the value and the insight that you know they don’t have.”

Taken together, these perspectives point to a clear blueprint for emerging TA leaders: anchor your leadership in credibility, not popularity; know and demonstrate your value; stay relentlessly curious; and have the courage to contribute insights others may not yet see. It’s a combination of mindset and behaviour that builds trust, earns influence, and positions you to shape outcomes at the highest level.

“If you want to be a strategic partner, you have to understand the business inside out, not just TA. That means knowing the numbers, the market, and the levers that drive growth.”



Dionne Atwill
Founder & CEO
ExecTASocial



Strategic investment priorities

When asked where they would invest extra budget, leaders pointed to two clear priorities: technology-driven solutions to boost reach and efficiency, and employer brand initiatives to strengthen long-term attraction.

On the technology side, Jennifer Turner (Aspen) prioritises AI-driven talent pooling and market expansion tools, while Kristian Warner (GSK) finds that targeted marketing spend for sourcing consistently outperforms traditional outreach in high-volume hiring. Sarah Shi (Merck) envisions “digital employees” taking on repetitive tasks, freeing humans to focus on innovation and leadership. Grant Weinberg (Guardant Health) would go further, investing in a dedicated data science resources “constantly mining the data... like Formula One telemetry” to optimise hiring decisions in real time.

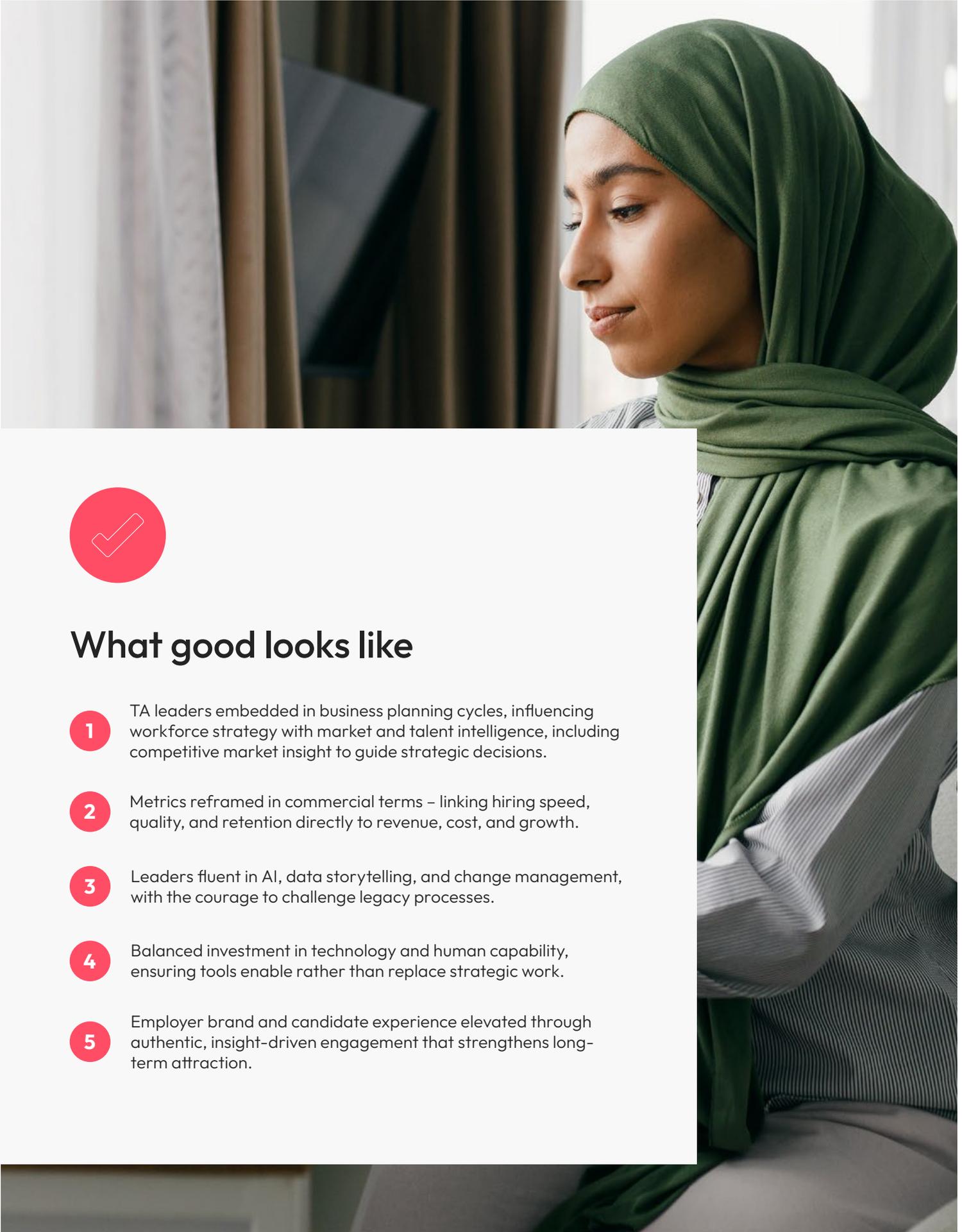
For others, employer brand is the most strategic lever. Dionne Atwill (ExecTASocial) would “heavily invest in an employer brand strategy so I could do my own attraction and sourcing to create a HolyGrail ATS talent pool or CRM and reduce reliance on other products that are perhaps a monopoly in the market.” Similarly, Julie Yeh (Air Liquide) would “invest in a robust Employer Branding strategy - involving more than superficial efforts; but a clear message communicating our organisational identity and value proposition to stand out in a competitive talent landscape filled with attention-grabbing social media content.”

Research backs these instincts. Deloitte Digital’s BrandWorth study shows that strong employer brands correlate more directly with revenue than awareness or NPS, while LinkedIn data indicates that companies with strong employer brands experience 28% lower turnover and up to 50% lower cost per hire. For TA leaders, that makes employer brand investment not just a marketing choice, but a strategic growth driver.

The future-ready TA leader

Kait Turnbull (BP) describes the future TA leader as “rounded” – commercially astute, ethically grounded, and tech-savvy. Sarah Shi (Merck) sees this moment as a “singular point” in technology history, where leaders who can integrate AI, human capability, and business strategy will define the next decade of talent acquisition. Jennifer Candee (IMI) cautions that “the tech can’t replace all the people needed to make it work well; they have to work in tandem” – a reminder that future-ready leaders balance digital fluency with human capability.

The main message is clear: the TA leader of the future is a strategist, a change agent, and a commercial partner – fluent in data, fearless in influence, and relentless in aligning talent to business outcomes.



What good looks like

- 1 TA leaders embedded in business planning cycles, influencing workforce strategy with market and talent intelligence, including competitive market insight to guide strategic decisions.
- 2 Metrics reframed in commercial terms – linking hiring speed, quality, and retention directly to revenue, cost, and growth.
- 3 Leaders fluent in AI, data storytelling, and change management, with the courage to challenge legacy processes.
- 4 Balanced investment in technology and human capability, ensuring tools enable rather than replace strategic work.
- 5 Employer brand and candidate experience elevated through authentic, insight-driven engagement that strengthens long-term attraction.



Key takeaways

- 1 Lead with business impact** – translate TA outcomes into metrics the C-suite values.
- 2 Build credibility** through data fluency, commercial acumen, market intelligence, and visible partnership with the business.
- 3 Invest in both technology and people** – including employer brand – to create a future-ready TA function.
- 4 Develop a leadership mindset** that blends strategic vision with operational credibility.
- 5 Prepare for continuous disruption** – agility, curiosity, and innovation are non-negotiable.



Conclusion

TA evolution 2026 – The road ahead

As Talent Acquisition continues to evolve, the insights shared in this guide highlight the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for TA leaders. From harnessing AI and embracing skills-first hiring to integrating non-permanent talent and positioning TA as a business driver, the future of TA demands agility, innovation, and alignment with commercial outcomes.

The pace of change is unrelenting, but so is the potential for transformation. TA leaders who adapt, experiment, and lead with insight will not only navigate disruption but thrive within it. As you reflect on the lessons from this guide, here are five key takeaways to shape your strategy for 2026 and beyond:



1 Reframe TA's value in commercial terms

To earn your seat at the table, position TA as a driver of business outcomes rather than a cost centre. Link hiring speed, quality, retention, and internal mobility directly to revenue growth, cost savings, and workforce agility. Speak the language of performance and risk to influence decisions at the highest level.

2 Leverage AI as an enabler, not a replacement

AI offers immense potential to automate low-value tasks, enhance decision-making, and improve candidate experience. However, its true value lies in amplifying human capability rather than replacing it. Invest in AI fluency across your team while embedding ethical governance to ensure transparency and trust.

3 Adopt a skills-first mindset

Move beyond rhetoric by operationalising skills-first hiring through shared taxonomies, structured assessments, and manager education. Prioritise potential over pedigree to unlock diverse talent pools and build resilience in an era of rapid skill disruption.

4 Unify talent functions across the employee lifecycle

Break down silos between TA, HR, and L&D to create integrated talent strategies that treat external hiring, internal mobility, development, and succession planning as one cohesive system. This orchestration improves outcomes while delivering a seamless employee experience.

5 Prepare for continuous disruption

Agility is no longer optional – it's essential. Build resilient core capabilities within your team while flexing resources around demand. Foster curiosity and experimentation to stay ahead of market shifts, technological advances, and evolving workforce expectations.

The future of TA is bright for those willing to embrace change and lead boldly. By aligning talent strategies with business priorities, leveraging technology responsibly, and fostering collaboration across functions, TA leaders can transform their teams into engines of growth and innovation.



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