

People at the Center of



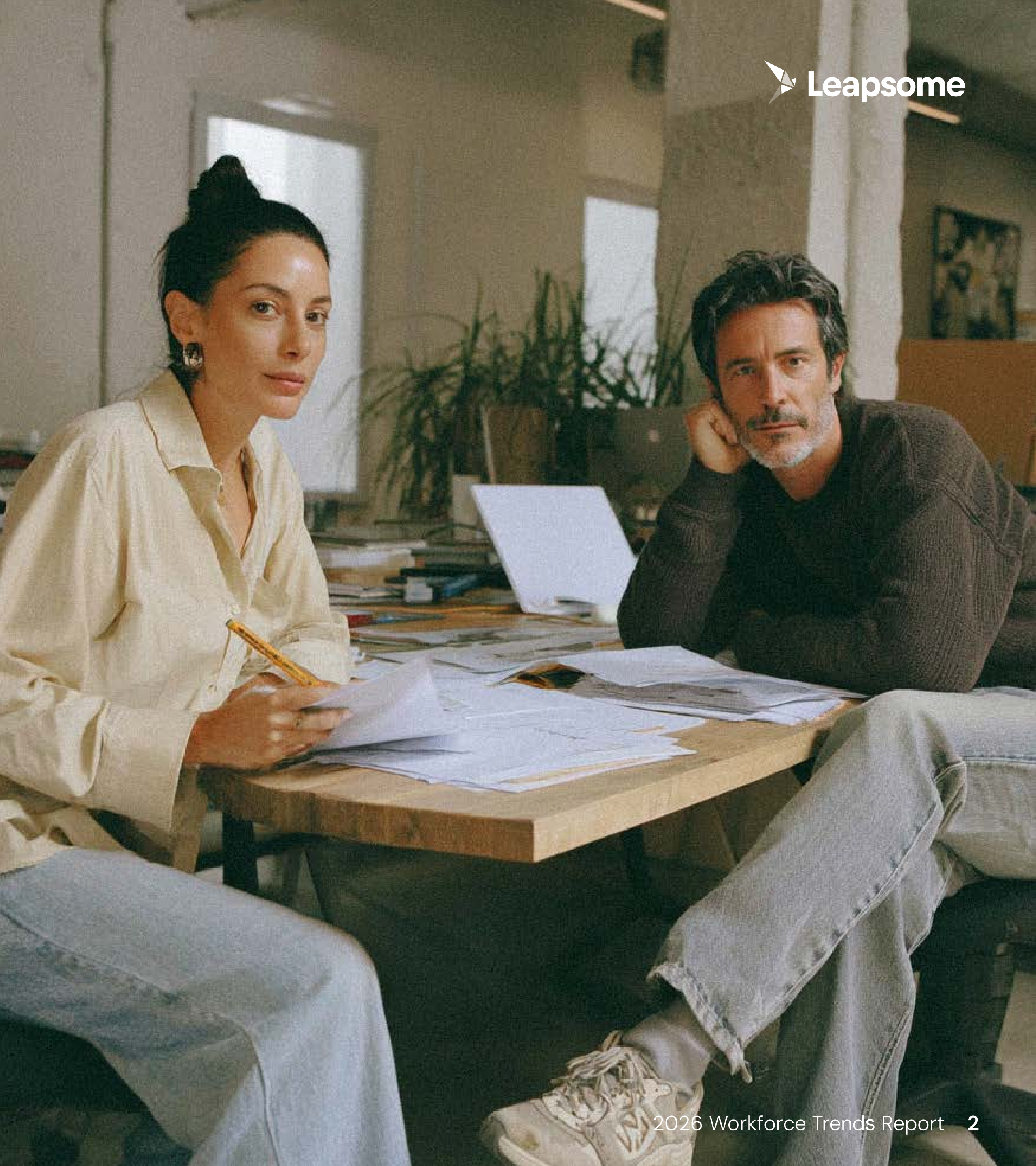
 **Leapsome**

2026

Workforce
Trends Report

Change

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People want to *grow*.
Your company needs *innovation*.
HR can *connect* the two.

Today's workforce is under pressure. Global shifts in trade, geopolitics, and technology are reshaping decisions inside and outside of work.

In our 2026 Workforce Trends Report, **2,400 employees and HR leaders share how they're affected:** the job market feels uncertain, and many people are holding onto jobs out of caution. Retention may look steady — but beneath the surface, motivation, trust, and performance are slipping.

AI is adding to the strain. It's entering workplaces much faster than the support available, raising expectations before employees have the time, skills, or clarity to adjust. Many are learning new tools while also covering work from colleagues whose roles weren't replaced.

With hiring slowed, the pressure lands on leaner teams. But without structure, training, and clear ownership, promised AI gains don't reach the people doing the work. This "crunch moment" slows innovation just when businesses rely on it for growth.



Jenny Podewils

Co-Founder & Co-CEO

@ Leapsome

For *HR leaders*, this is a chance to turn pressure into *progress*.

People teams play a critical role in balancing employee needs with business demands, guiding AI into daily work with clear communication and guardrails, and rebuilding trust through transparency and follow-through. When growth paths are visible and time to learn and experiment is protected, it's much easier for people to keep pace and for innovation to move forward.

This report explores:

- Why steady headcount can mask a stagnant, disengaged workforce
- How AI is creating both new opportunities and concerns
- Where trust is breaking down and how to restore it

At Leapsome, we believe people are key for the future of work — and the foundation of business success. Done right, AI can support better work and help HR leaders build resilient organizations where people *and* business thrive.

Sample

Survey of 2,400 full-time professionals (30+ hours/week)

- **Roles:** managers (1,034), individual contributors (566), and HR leaders (800)
- **Company size:** 50–2,500 employees
- **Industries:** tech, consulting, marketing, advertising, PR, market research, IT/computing, business services, media
- **Locations:** US, UK, Germany, Netherlands

Methodology

- 15-min online survey
- Responses collected between June 21 and July 2, 2025

Findings are directional and reflect trends across our sample. Individual organizations may face different conditions depending on their structure, culture, and context.

Core trends redefining the future of work & leadership

01

Employees are staying for security, not satisfaction

Many employees remain in roles for stability, even if they're no longer the right fit.

Market signals and wider uncertainty play a part; the cost is disengagement, lower motivation, and slower progress.

02

AI ambition without readiness undermines productivity

Some companies have slowed junior hiring and backfilling, expecting AI to fill the gaps.

Without clear strategy, effective training, and strong change management, pressure mounts on remaining teams — and gains fall short.

03

The AI skills gap is limiting innovation

Most organizations lack clarity and strategy around AI learning.

Many employees don't understand how AI applies to their role or who is responsible for training. This is slowing adoption and fueling anxiety.

04

Trust in HR is under strain — but it can be renewed

In people-centric companies, business and employee interests often align; however, trust only holds when there is transparency, consistency, and follow-through.

Many workers still question whether HR can influence decisions that affect them.

How Leapsome *can support you* in 2026

Leapsome brings HRIS, performance, and engagement into one platform — so you can spend less time on admin and more with your people.

Take a 5-minute tour

My dashboard

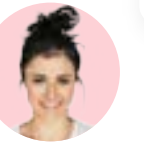


Nathan Lane
Engineering Lead

👉 Nathan's praise

Thanks to your efforts, we finished the project a week early! Could not have done it without you.

On PTO this week



Company absence



-4%



4.9/5 ★★★★★
1,700+ VERIFIED USER REVIEWS

Trend #1 →

**Employees are
staying for security,
not satisfaction**

Why “good” retention can hide a disengaged *workforce*

At first glance, stable retention can look like a win. But many employees aren’t staying because they’re thriving — **they’re staying because leaving feels risky**. Job growth is slowing across major markets,* making roles harder to land and riskier to give up.

At the same time, AI is changing job requirements so quickly that 33% of employees doubt their skills would match what’s expected in a new role. Under that pressure, people are choosing safety over satisfaction.

*Source: OECD’s *Employment Outlook 2025*

1 in 4

stay because they fear
the risks of changing jobs



54%

are staying for reasons
other than liking their work



1 in 3

doubt their skills would
meet the demands of a
new role with AI



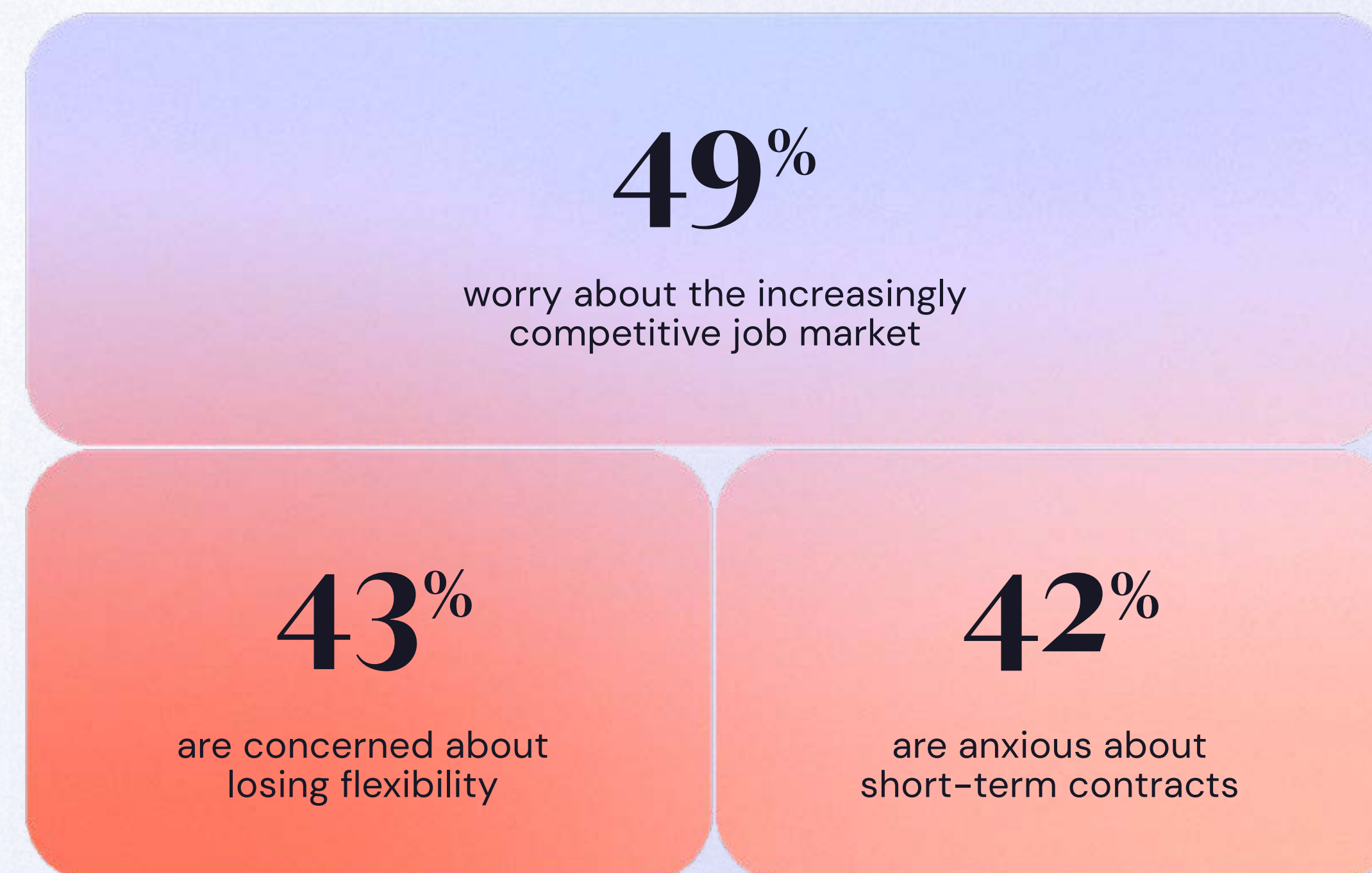
~1 in 3

(30%) want to leave their current workplace, but:

Job changes feel *risky* — even for those ready to leave

For 1 in 3 employees, the desire to move on is real, but so is the fear of what comes next. Short-term contracts, fewer flexible options, and a tougher market make change feel unsafe.

Add concerns about fast-changing AI skills, global instability, and shifting economies, and it's clear why many would-be job movers hesitate.



The *cost* of fear-based retention

For ICs that stay out of fear, these are the top 3 negative effects that they experience:

1

Lower emotional and mental well-being

2

Reduced motivation and engagement

3

Less feelings of belonging or connection

Fear-driven choices drain energy, reduce motivation, and erode connection to culture — weakening the foundations of performance and innovation.

Productivity is the first thing to go when motivation fades

When morale drops, the effects show up fast: work slows, tensions rise, and burnout spreads. Six in ten HR leaders and managers say disengagement directly cuts performance — and the financial toll is staggering.

According to Gallup, global disengagement costs businesses around US\$8.8 trillion annually, or 9% of global GDP.*

*Source: Gallup State of the Global Workplace: 2023 Report

60%

say disengagement lowers performance*



48%

report more burnout in disengaged teams



47%

say disengagement fuels conflict and toxic behaviors



Why motivation slips

Individual contributors say disengagement comes down to the basics: too little growth, too much work, and unhealthy cultures.

For those staying out of fear, the trade-offs feel like stability — but they also cost performance.

Top disengagement drivers

47%

lack of career
growth and
development
opportunities

45%

unmanageable
workloads and
poor work-life
balance

42%

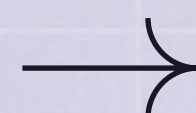
unhealthy
workplace
culture

Turn insights into *action*

To break fear-based retention, reset the conditions so people can contribute from day one and grow with confidence.

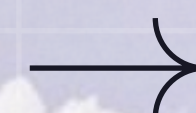
Create visible career paths

Make growth paths and expectations clear; connect growth to team purpose and mission, and recognize progress early.



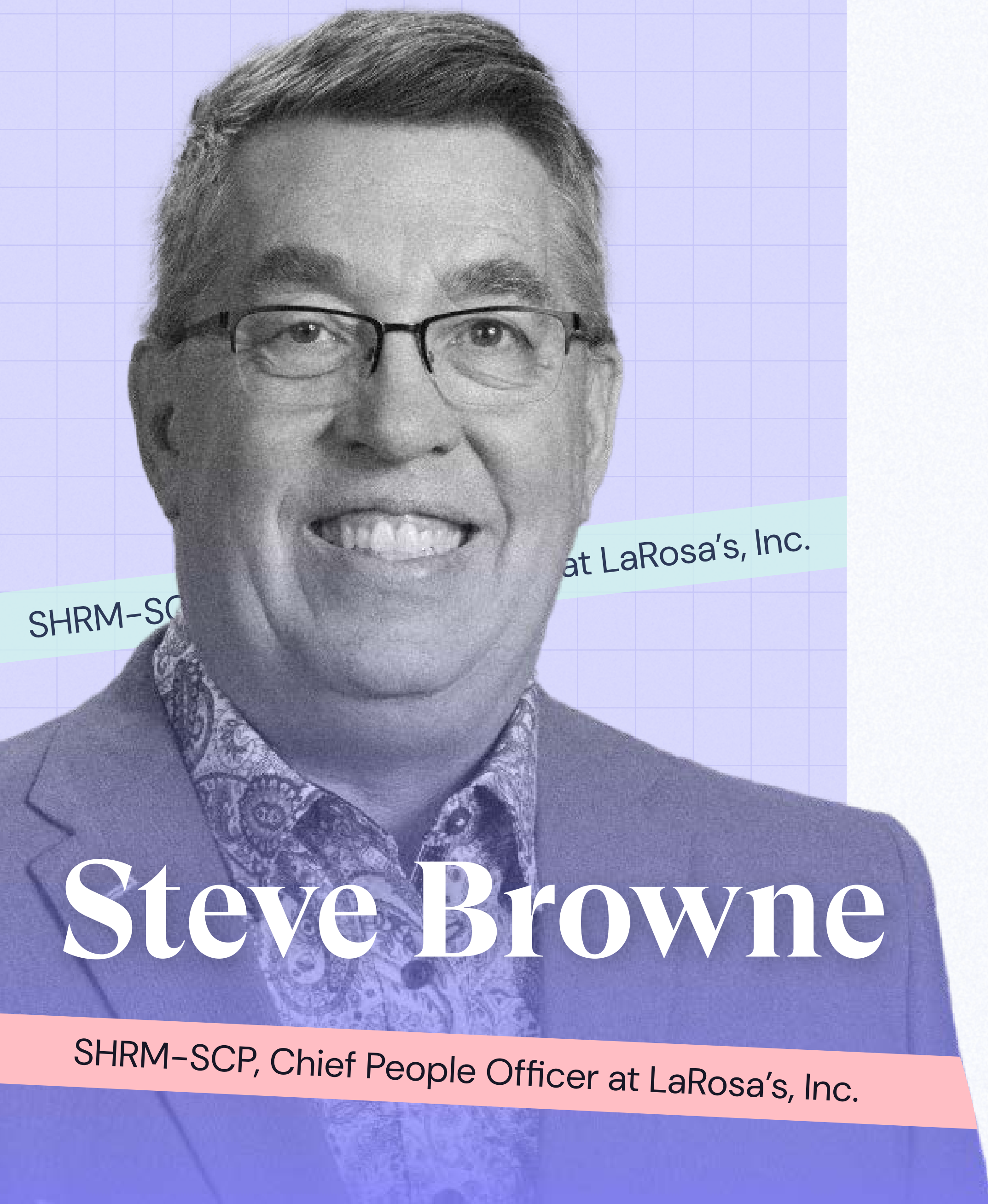
Rebalance workloads

Align responsibilities to capacity; remove low-value work to protect focus and well-being.



Restore trust & purpose

Explain decisions, act on feedback, and close the loop. Tie goals to customer and business impact so people see why their work matters.



Steve Browne

SHRM-SCP, Chief People Officer at LaRosa's, Inc.

Anchor your *people*

Engagement, as we've defined it for the past 20 years, is dead.

What people want has changed. They don't need to be entertained — they want to contribute from the moment they join. Our job is to remove the hoops and hurdles and let them add value right away.

In a world of personalization, employees want to plug in, get instant feedback, and move with purpose. This is not tied to a generational argument. Today's workforce doesn't want to be engaged. It longs to be anchored.

Anchoring gives people a clear role, a sense of security, and visible connection. When employees feel anchored, they know they matter, they see their place in the company, and they can weather any storm. That stability fuels collaboration, diverse perspectives, and belonging.

Look around your organization. Where could you take steps to anchor your people? Take those steps, and you'll see what true engagement looks like!!

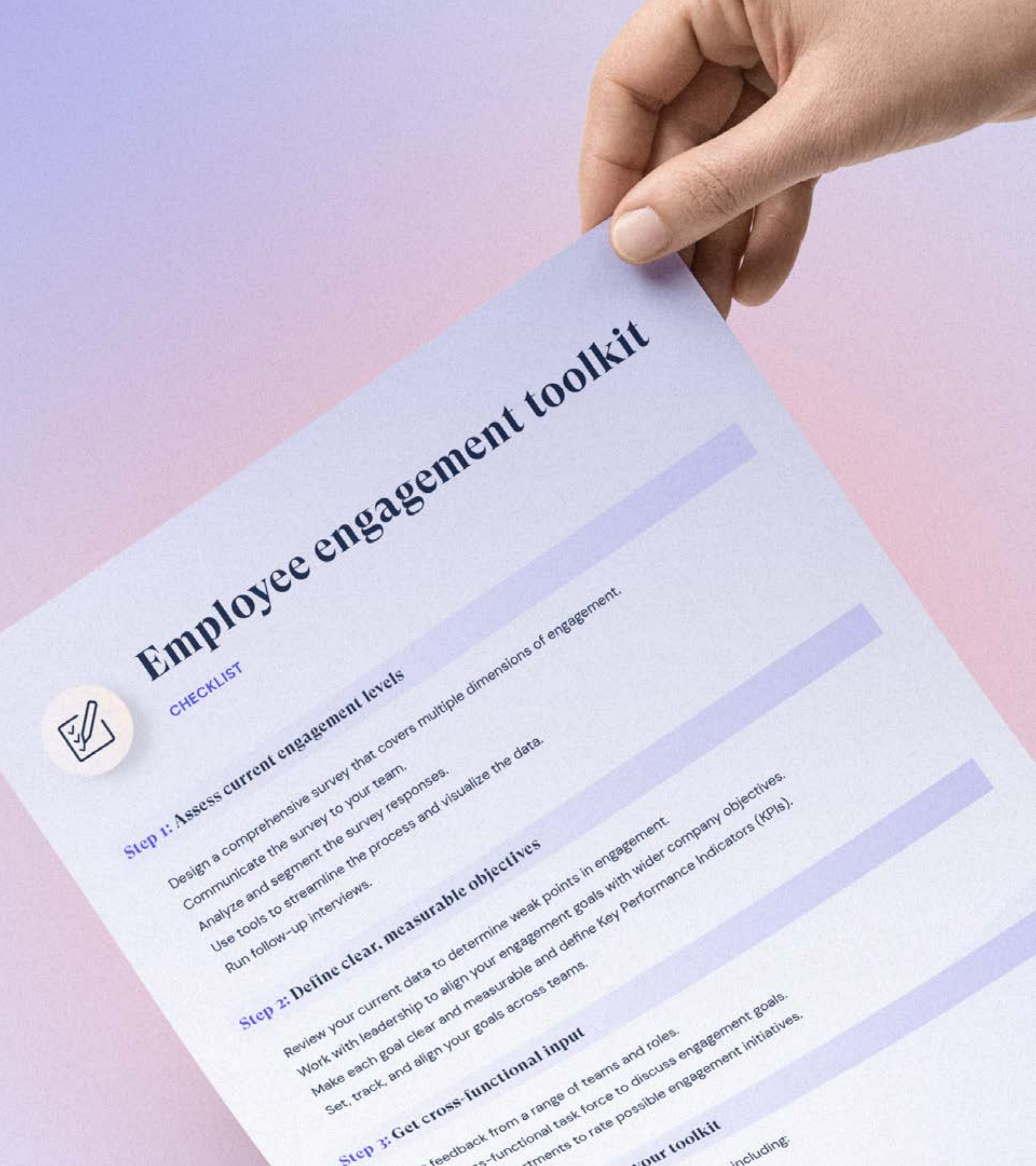
Employee engagement *toolkit*

Keeping employees connected and motivated doesn't happen by chance — it takes the right tools and practices. That's why Leapsome created this employee engagement toolkit: a practical guide for HR and managers to strengthen culture, boost retention, and drive performance.

What's inside

- Step-by-step checklist to design your engagement strategy
- Templates for surveys, feedback, and recognition programs
- Ideas for learning & development and team-building activities
- Communication and wellness frameworks that support culture

 [Get the full toolkit](#)



Help employees see a future worth *staying* for

Leapsome makes career growth meaningful and fair by streamlining reviews, clarifying competencies, and turning feedback into development.

Explore Reviews

My assessments



Naomi Bennett
Account Executive

Communication: Listen actively

1

Below expectations

2

Meeting expectations

3

Above expectations

- Great listener
- Always follows up with stakeholders
- Searches for cause of problems with s



Improve review

Naomi excels at listening and consistently engages with stakeholders to thoroughly understand the root of any problem.

Trend #2 →

**AI ambition without
readiness undermines
productivity**

New tools, new rules, new *pressure*

AI promises big gains in productivity and innovation. But for many employees, it's also arriving with an unspoken goal: **to free up not just time, but headcount.** That makes it feel less like an opportunity and more like a source of fear and pressure.

Instead of easing workloads, AI often adds new demands. Teams are asked to deliver more while backfills pause and junior hiring slows. Employees are left covering gaps and learning new tools at the same time — a setup that fuels stress, slows progress, and chips away at confidence.

It's a crunch moment: expectations are rising faster than the structures to support them.



Backfills on hold: cuts to roles seen as “AI-replaceable”

Many companies are holding off on backfilling roles to see what AI might replace. It’s a cautious “wait and see” approach that leaves remaining employees carrying extra work.

Teams are left to cover existing responsibilities while also figuring out how AI might replace these roles. **This adds pressure, fuels skepticism, and leaves employees stretched across too much work with too few resources.**

53%

of HR leaders say **AI** has
led to decisions not to
backfill certain roles



A constant catch-up culture is *draining* teams

Leaders want quick results from AI, but many employees are still figuring out where to start. Half say they need new skills just to manage their workload, and more than a third admit they can't keep up with the expectations leadership sets.

This creates a cycle of constant “catching up” — draining energy, adding stress, and making AI feel like a moving target instead of a clear solution.

According to all respondents in our survey:

50%

say they **need to improve their AI skills** to manage their workload

48%

feel pressure from leadership to implement AI in their workflows

38%

say they **cannot keep up** with the pace leadership expects



The promise of AI efficiency starts with more *complexity*

AI isn't plug-and-play. While leaders expect it to save time, the transition often creates more work upfront.

HR reports the steepest rise in responsibilities since introducing AI, and more than half of employees across roles say they lose time to reviewing and correcting AI output.

Without realistic timelines and support, the early phase of AI adoption can feel like an obstacle course — and the promised efficiency has yet to materialize.



56%

of all respondents spend significant time reviewing and fixing AI output



43%

of HR leaders report higher responsibilities since AI's introduction (more than any other group)



25%

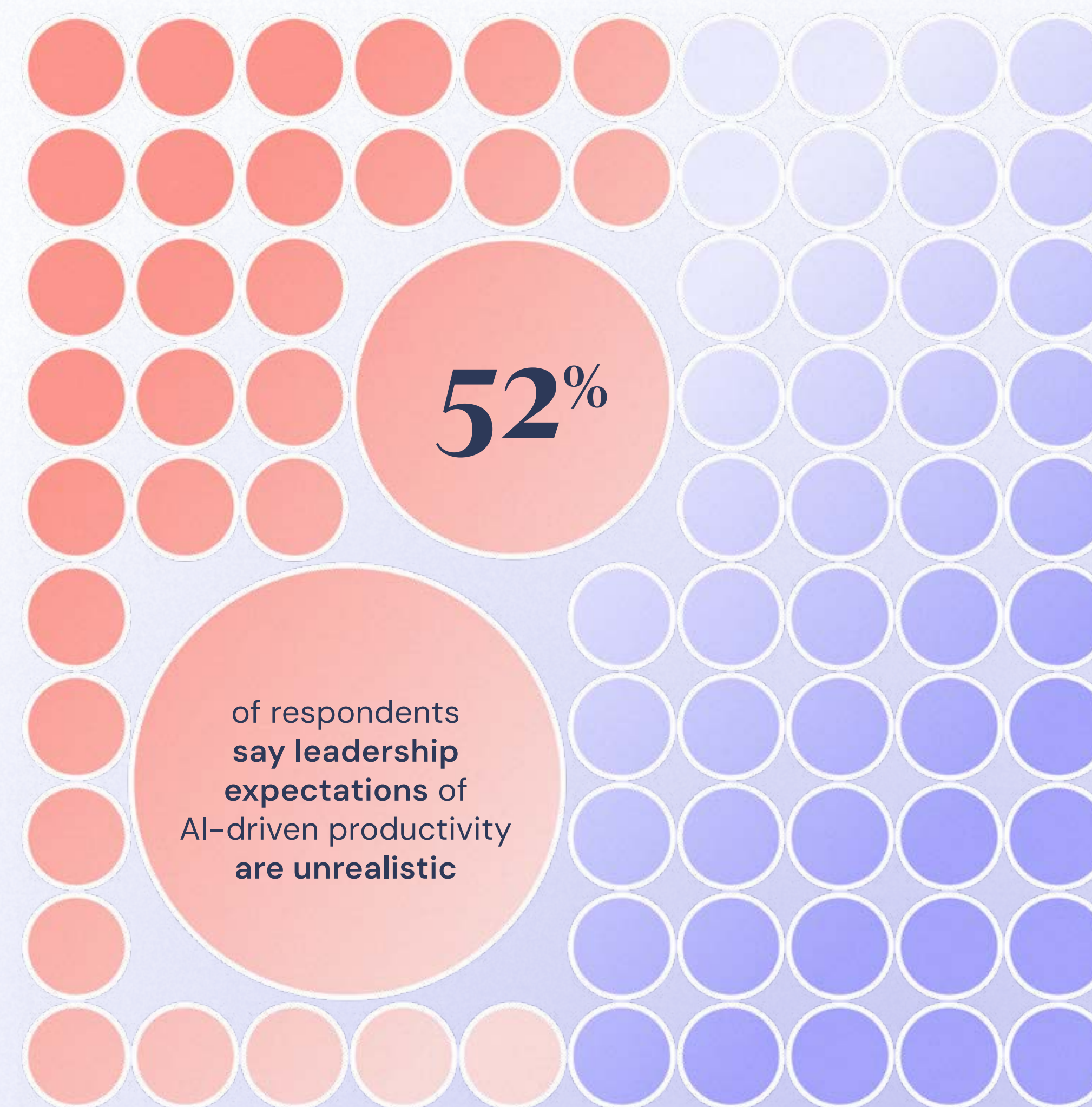
of all respondents say AI creates significant upfront work without enough support

Unrealistic expectations are turning AI into a stress multiplier

As teams work through AI's steep learning curve, many feel the targets they're given don't match reality.

More than half of employees report that leadership overestimates what AI can achieve — especially in the short term.

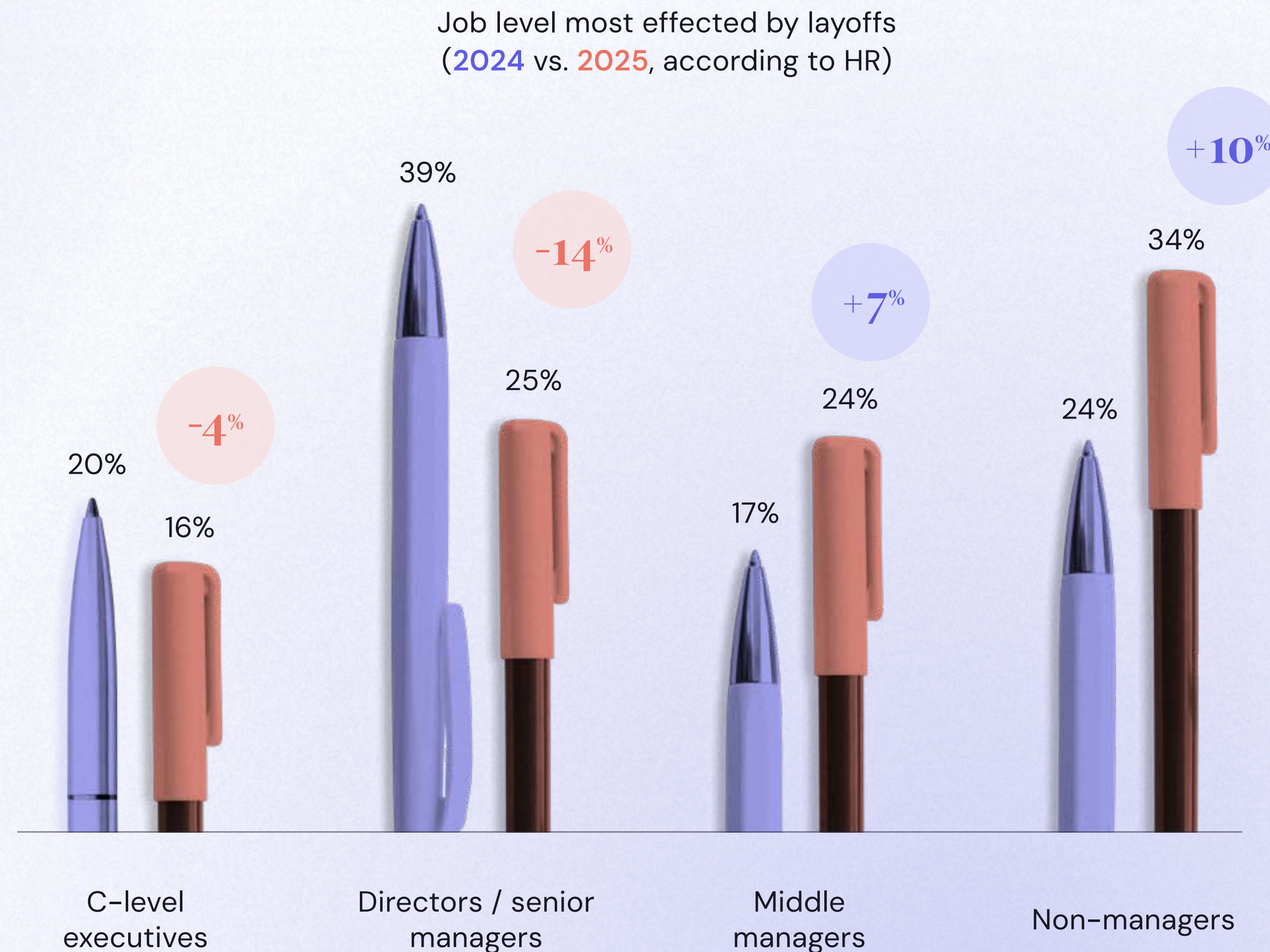
For those already adapting to new responsibilities and smaller teams, these high expectations add more strain, creating pressure to deliver results before the right conditions are in place.



Layoffs shift down the ladder

AI is also impacting layoff decisions. Last year, cuts were concentrated at the top. This year, they've moved down into **middle management and especially junior roles**.

It's a tough time to start a career, as opportunities shrink and early-career paths narrow. And when early-career talent disappears, teams lose vital support, workloads rise, and the pipeline for tomorrow's specialists and leaders weakens.



Short-term cuts, long-term cost: junior talent is being *replaced*

These cuts reflect a growing belief that AI can take over entry-level work. Nearly half of HR leaders say junior roles are being reduced or removed with the expectation that AI will fill the gap.

Paired with an overestimation of AI's capabilities, the result is often more pressure on mid-level employees, who are left to oversee and complete work that may look easily automated, but in practice still needs human judgment and oversight.

44%

of HR leaders say junior roles are being replaced by AI and no longer hired



Anxiety about AI replacement still lingers

While fear of AI has eased since 2024, many employees remain uneasy about the long-term relevance of their roles.

This concern lowers confidence, makes people hesitant to share ideas and slows innovation.

39%

of all respondents are still scared that AI will replace a large part of their role

↓ Down by 16% from 2024

36%

of ICs think their role will be more easily (or fully) replaced by AI in 2026

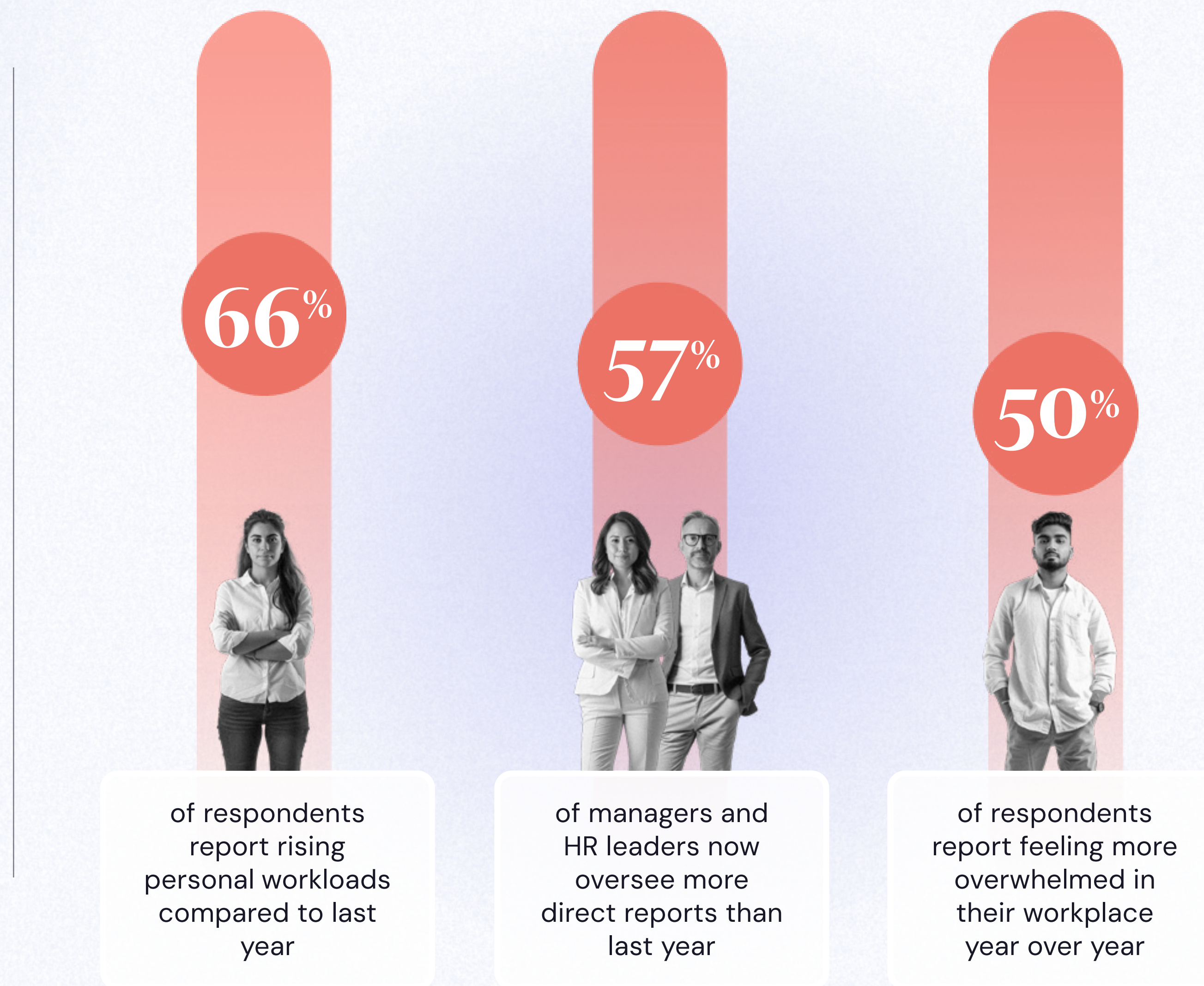
8%

of HR leaders believe their role will be completely replaced by AI in 2026

Mental health is *worsening* as workloads continue to rise

Nearly two-thirds of employees say their workload has grown over the past year. Half report feeling more overwhelmed, and managers now oversee larger teams as hiring stalls.

This constant overload chips away at focus, well-being, and the ability to perform at a high level.



4 out of 5 employees *don't* feel fully supported

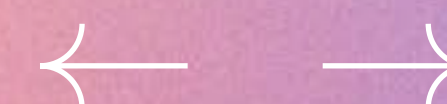
As workloads rise, expectations increase, and new skills are required, many employees feel they're navigating change on their own.

Four out of five don't feel fully supported — a gap that erodes trust, makes it harder to perform, and slows innovation.



24%

of ICs **don't feel supported**
by their company



21%

feel **fully**
supported

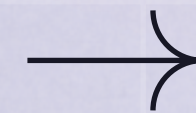
Turn insights into *action*

Navigate AI rollouts with clear ownership, training, and rules people can trust.

Set a realistic AI runway

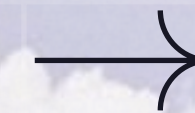
Adopt a “pilot → standardize → scale” plan with defined workload offsets at each step.

Tie targets to measurable use cases with clear decision gates.



Protect teams when backfills pause

After someone leaves, reassess priorities: pause low-impact tasks, clarify new responsibilities, and decide which projects to deprioritize.



Make enablement visible

Publish a 90-day enablement plan: who owns training, what “good” looks like by role, and where to get help (office hours, team AI champions).



Stakkd

Founde

Jessie Schofer

Founder of Stakkd

If you can get *prioritization* right in a People team, you're already 10x ahead.

When workload pressure builds and backfills aren't an option, the smartest move is to step back and reassess. **The goal is to keep the highest-ROI topics front and center, pausing or parking lower-value work.**

From my experience, using the RICE framework (Reach, Impact, Confidence, Effort) alongside a clear stack-ranking system is one of the most effective ways to make trade-offs visible and remove ambiguity. The point isn't to squeeze more out of less, but to make smarter choices with the capacity you have.

Transparency is equally important: share your priorities openly with the business, explain why certain work has been paused, and tie it all back to company goals and values.

I've found this approach not only sets realistic expectations but also reduces the pressure managers and ICs feel when everything seems urgent. It also helps you drive positive value perception and be seen as strategic.

How to support managers and ICs through workload pressure — especially when backfills are *paused*

Budget cuts, hiring freezes, and resignations happen. Roles aren't backfilled. But that doesn't give us permission to overwork those who stay. As leaders, we sometimes push teams **without realizing the pressure they're already under**.

Here's how to support our teams through workload pressure:

1. Stop projects

If there aren't enough people to do the work, not everything can get done. Some projects just need to be cancelled. Be loud about stopping projects, so no one keeps doing the work undercover. Don't let ego or personal agendas drive decisions. Focus on what must get done versus what's no longer relevant.

2. Reassess job descriptions

Who was hired to do what? What work are they actually doing now? How has their role changed? Consistently check in with team members about workloads and give clarity on where they can make the biggest impact.

3. Set & keep boundaries

Say no when others come to "invite" the team to do extra work or "dump" projects on them. A response like, "We wish we could help, but we don't have the bandwidth to take this on," is a good start. Share the boundaries you've set with your team for alignment and to ensure everyone can focus on their best work.



Workplace

Author

Mita Mallick

Workplace Strategist & Author

AI Adoption Framework

AI is reshaping work, but most organizations aren't ready. Employees want skills, structure, and clarity, and HR is best placed to lead the shift. This framework gives HR leaders a practical roadmap to move beyond the hype and guide responsible AI adoption across people, processes, and culture.

What's inside

- A 3-pillar framework: readiness, governance, enablement
- Practical steps to turn ambition into roles, rituals, and guardrails
- Clear metrics to track adoption before ROI
- Common pitfalls to avoid and manager practices that drive adoption

Get the full framework



Bring *clarity & structure* to AI-powered people ops

Leapsome's AI Copilot helps HR and managers run better reviews, build competency frameworks, and guide development with context-aware feedback and best practices.

Explore Leapsome AI

Competency frameworks



David Anderson
CTO



Generate competency framework

Department name

Frontend development

Number of competencies

1 2 3 4 5 6

Number of levels

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Generate with AI

David Anderson

What's our sick leave policy in the UK?

Leapy AI

David Anderson

What are the company best practices for performance reviews?

Leapy AI

Trend #3 →

The AI skills gap is limiting innovation

AI can be a growth story, *if* you build for it

AI doesn't have to be a threat. It can create new career paths, spark innovation, and help people build long-term security by developing new skills — **but only if companies give employees the clarity, tools, and ownership they need to grow with it.**

Most organizations aren't there yet. Adoption is rising and HR leaders are already seeing new roles emerge, but the challenge is turning early progress into lasting growth.

77%

of HR leaders say AI has already created new roles in their organization

31%

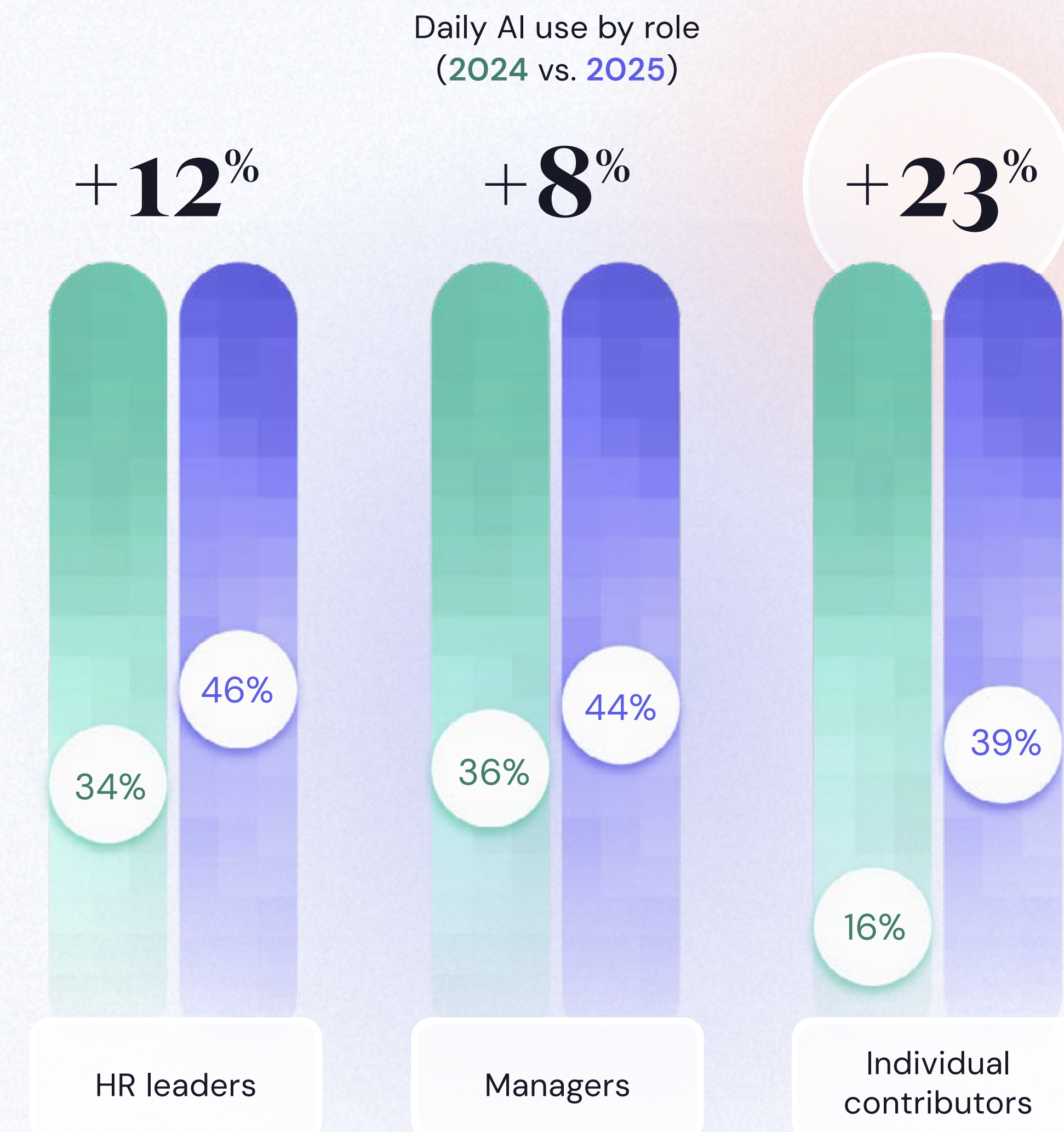
of respondents say improving AI skills reduces the risk of their role being replaced

Employees are *narrowing* the AI use gap with leaders

Daily AI use is increasing across roles. **Leaders remain the most consistent users, but employees are quickly catching up** — a sign people are ready to adapt as AI becomes part of daily work.

Still, adoption alone won't close the skills gap. Without clear guidance on how to apply AI, benefits remain uneven, and some employees risk falling behind.

For adoption to mean progress, employees need clear guidance and support alongside the tools.

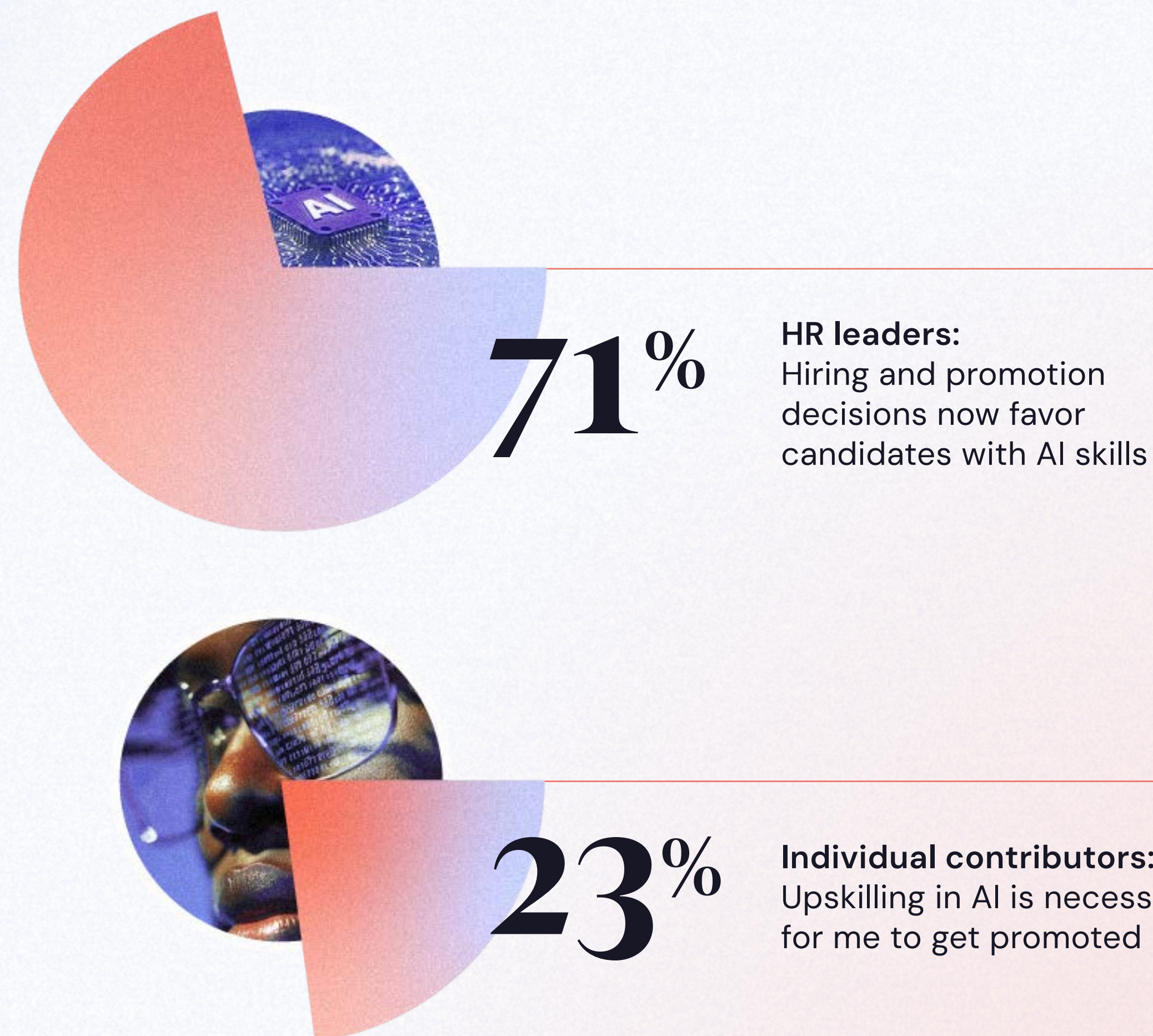


HR & employees *divided* on AI's career impact

AI literacy is influencing who gets hired and promoted. HR leaders say AI skills now weigh heavily in decisions, but most employees don't yet see them as essential for advancement.

This perception gap risks slowing adoption and creating missed opportunities for growth.

If AI knowledge is becoming a hiring standard, the smarter move is to invest in upskilling the people you already have. It's not only more cost-effective than replacing talent, but also builds loyalty and fairness — ensuring progress benefits everyone.



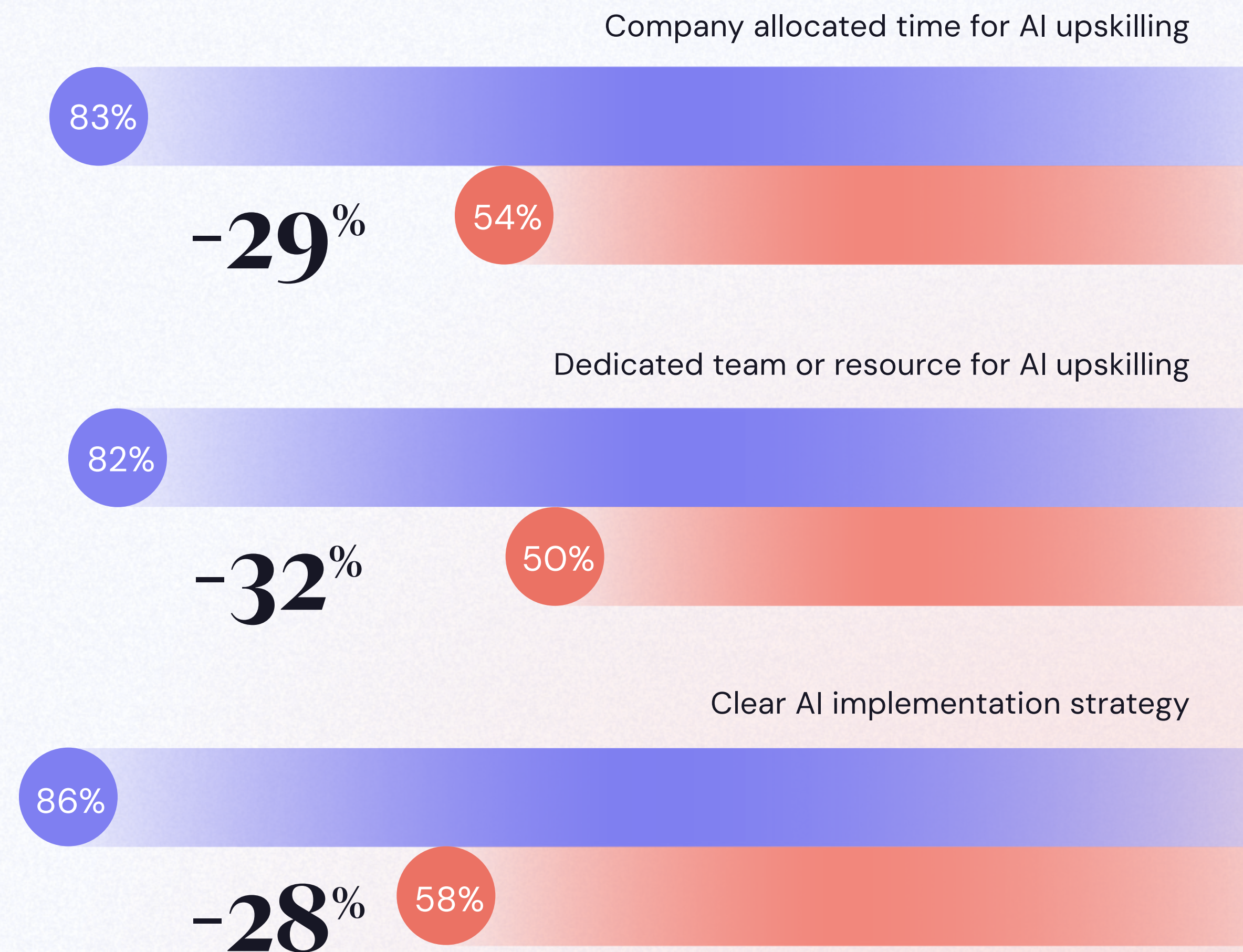
AI training isn't landing with employees

Companies are investing into AI learning, but many employees say the basics still aren't showing up in daily work. Leaders report that time, guidance, and strategies exist, yet individual contributors experience far less support in practice.

When training feels disconnected from real roles, adoption slows. Employees want to know how AI applies to their work, why it matters, and how to use it effectively.

Without clarity, even well-funded programs risk becoming check-the-box efforts that widen the skills gap instead of closing it.

A gap in perception: AI time, resources, and strategy
(HR leaders and individual contributors)



Who owns AI training?

Part of the challenge is unclear ownership. Most respondents point to IT as the team responsible for AI training. However, IT typically focuses on tools and security, not adoption or day-to-day learning.

That's where HR comes in. **HR's role is to bridge implementation and enablement** — ensuring technical rollouts translate into clear guidance, accessible learning, and confident adoption. Without this balance, training stays fragmented and progress slows.

Who should be responsible for AI training?

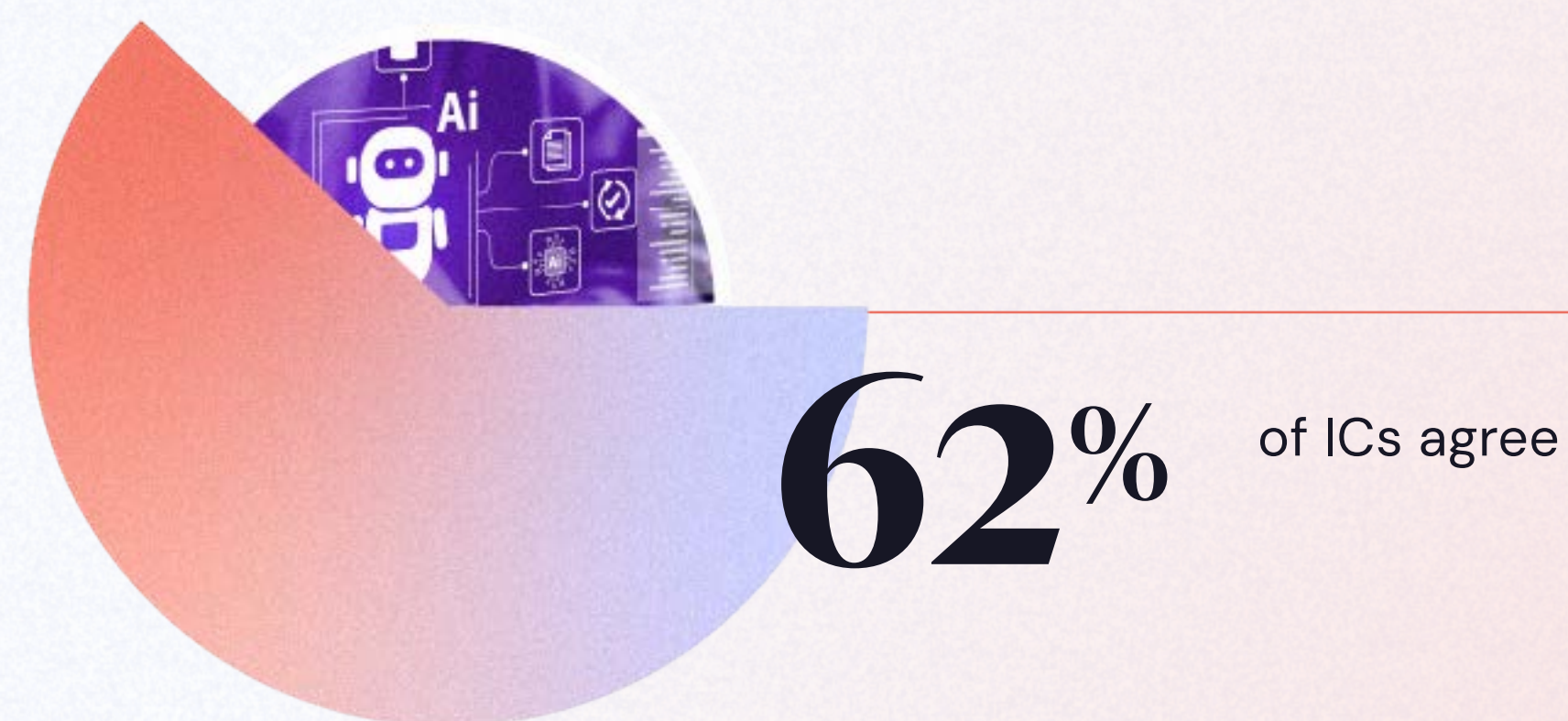


There's a *confidence gap* about AI training

Regardless of their involvement, most HR leaders are confident their companies will deliver the AI training people need. **Employees aren't so sure.**

38% of individual contributors aren't convinced their company will provide the specific training they need. Without follow-through, even well-designed programs risk being seen as empty promises.

My company will provide the **necessary training** for employees to **keep up with AI**



Budgets for *AI learning* are growing

Companies are dedicating more and more resources to AI upskilling, but money alone doesn't build trust. What matters more is whether that spend translates into real learning and impact for employees.

76%

of HR leaders and managers say their company has a budget for AI learning



11%

of total company budgets in 2025 were allocated to AI tools, experts, and training



 Roughly 1 in every \$10 is spent on AI

68%

expect these budgets to grow by the end of 2026



AI adoption needs both skills *and* clear rules

And impact isn't just about training budgets. Employees also need clear skills development and rules they can trust in daily work.

Many HR leaders say those policies are already in place, **but most employees don't know such guardrails exist or don't understand them.** This lack of visibility leaves people second-guessing how and when to use AI, applying it inconsistently, and missing opportunities to make it genuinely useful.

My company has a **clear AI policy** and **reliable guardrails** around AI use

76% of HR leaders agree

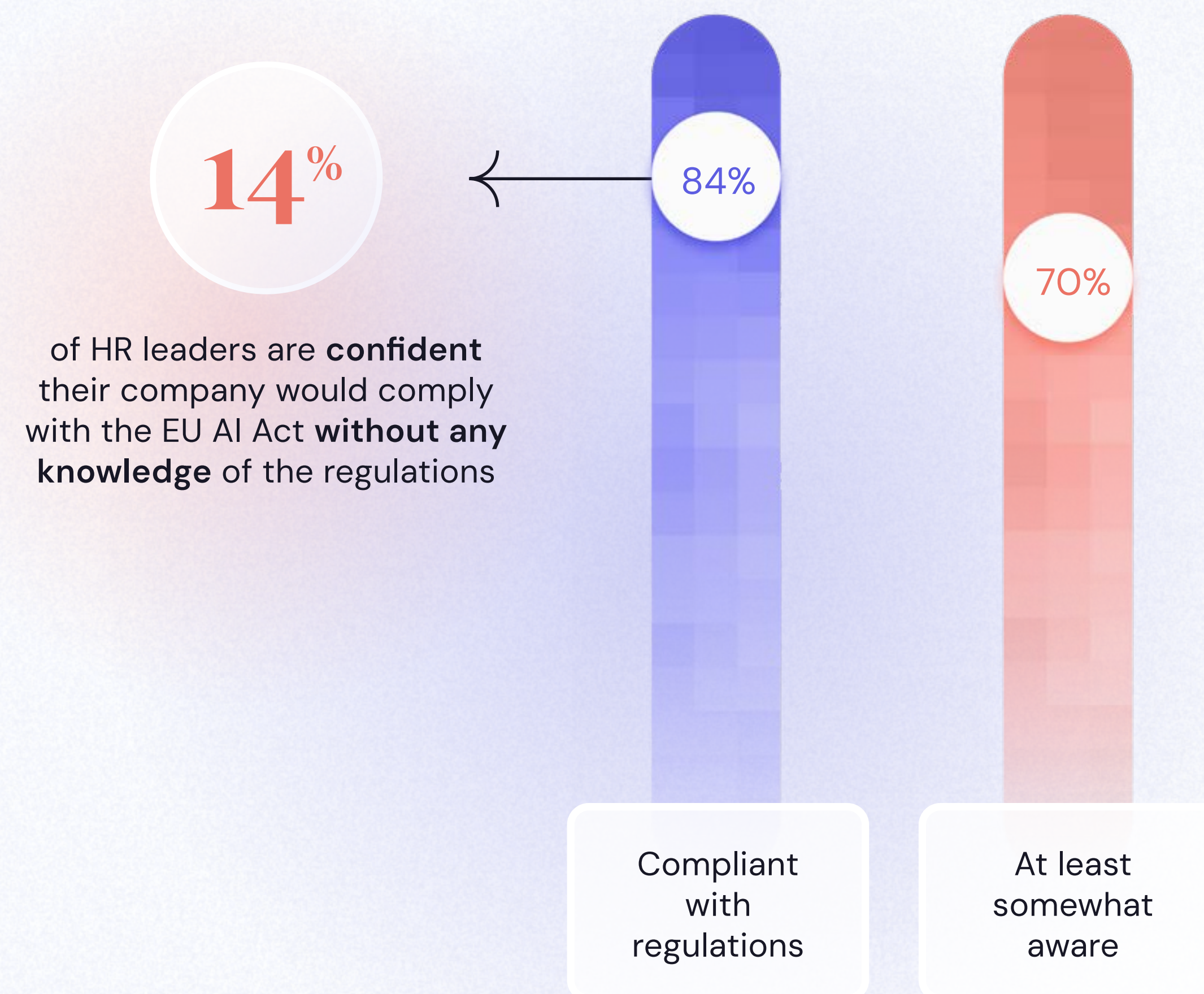
48% of ICs agree



HR feels confident about AI compliance — even *without* the facts

Compliance is part of the guardrails conversation, but knowledge gaps remain. **One in four HR leaders admit they don't understand key regulations** like the EU AI Act, and some have never heard of it. Despite this, most still express confidence their company would be ready if the Act took effect tomorrow..

Such a disconnect at the leadership level is risky. It leaves organizations open to compliance breaches, reputational harm, and strategic missteps as AI becomes more regulated.



Clarity turns AI pressure into *progress*

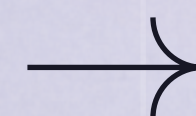
- HR-supported rollouts, visible rules, and well-designed training shift the perception of AI from a source of stress into a source of value.
- When AI upskilling is done well, it builds knowledge and confidence. Employees see a clear path to grow, stay engaged in their roles, and recognize that the company is invested in their future.
- With clear expectations and accessible support, AI adoption feels safe and delivers results.

Turn insights into *action*

Make AI easier to adopt by giving people ownership, role-based skills, and visible value.

Name the owner

Assign responsibility for AI upskilling and adoption; HR leads enablement, IT secures tools, and managers model everyday use.



Make rules visible

Publish plain-language guardrails with examples; open “safe to ask” channels and office hours.



Show the value

Translate training into role-based use cases; time-box pilots; enlist early adopters as peer coaches and share wins.



AI moves fast. Human *leadership* keeps pace.

AI is racing ahead, faster than most organizations can keep up with. The ambition is huge, but without the right support, employees feel overwhelmed, leaders lose trust, and innovation slows.

The technology isn't the risk. What puts organizations at risk is leaving people behind — missing the chance to use AI to free them from busywork so they can do what only humans can: lead, create, and connect.

The solution isn't always another platform or dashboard. It's leadership.

Platforms and dashboards have their place, but real progress depends on leadership. The Candor, Courage & Care™ model is designed to guide that.

Candor (the *what*):

Name what's real. Use AI-driven insights to tell the truth with clarity and context so teams know what matters most.

Courage (the *when*):

Step in at the critical moments. Decide when to act, when to speak up, and when to push back on bias — whether it comes from people or from the technology.

Care (the *why*):

Lead with presence and purpose. Show why people matter more than platforms, building trust and belonging as the foundation for growth.

When leaders bring Candor, Courage & Care™, AI shifts from overwhelming to empowering. It fuels productivity, while human leadership ensures trust, resilience, and innovation.

The future of work isn't machine vs. human. It's machine + human. AI accelerates. Candor, Courage & Care™ keeps it human.

Chief People Officer & Founder at AssembleHR



Kristen
Lisanti

Founder at Radiant Change

From fear to *flow*

As current approaches to AI adoption foster cultures of fear, these 10 Truths of Radiant Change offer a simple framework for finding flow.

Change is...

Inevitable. Recognize AI's benefits and risks, and that it's here to stay.

Possible. Envision a future of AI-enabled work—teams with time to think, enhanced creativity, accelerated advancement — and share this vision widely.

Complex. AI isn't a silver bullet or a quick fix. It demands strategic alignment, training, workflow redesign, and cultural adaptation.

Uncomfortable. Engage early and often, with empathy. Honor fears before trying to build excitement about emerging opportunities.

Intentional. Stop performing certainty at the leadership level; model curiosity and a growth mindset instead.

Personal. Every AI conversation builds or breaks trust. Use disagreements to sharpen perspectives and shape better solutions.





Kristen
Lisanti

Founder at Radiant Change



Fractal. Build momentum with early adopters rather than mandating uniform adoption. Peer superusers can be more influential than executives.

Inclusive. The best ideas come from those closest to the work. Co-create AI strategy with actual users, not assumptions.

Iterative. Create feedback loops capturing both successes and failures. Encourage AI experimentation, sharing what works and what doesn't.

Infinite. Celebrate progress over perfection, building organizations that continuously evolve with emerging technologies.

The organizations that thrive in the AI era will be those that pair artificial intelligence with human insight — multiplying the power of both.

Instead of defaulting to unrealistic expectations, inadequate support, and eroding trust, leaders have the choice to create a different path forward.

AI Readiness Assessment

Measure your organization's AI maturity across strategy, culture, managers, and infrastructure

Assess your organization's AI maturity

This assessment evaluates your AI maturity across strategy, culture, managers, and infrastructure. It takes 2.5 minutes. Honest answers = better recommendations for your specific situation.



Identify
strategic gaps

missing
and



Strengthen org
readiness

Build confident,
AI-ready teams and
managers



Get your
personalized roadmap

Receive prioritized next
steps for your
organization

AI Readiness *Assessment*

Preparing your workforce for AI adoption takes more than technology — it demands strategy, culture, and confident leaders.

In just 2.5 minutes, this assessment will measure your organization's AI maturity and uncover how to close your specific gaps.

What's inside

- A quick quiz to assess strategy, culture, managers, and infrastructure
- Instant results showing your organization's AI maturity level
- Personalized roadmap with prioritized next steps
- Recommendations to strengthen adoption and reduce risks



Take the quiz now

AI Upskilling *Guide*

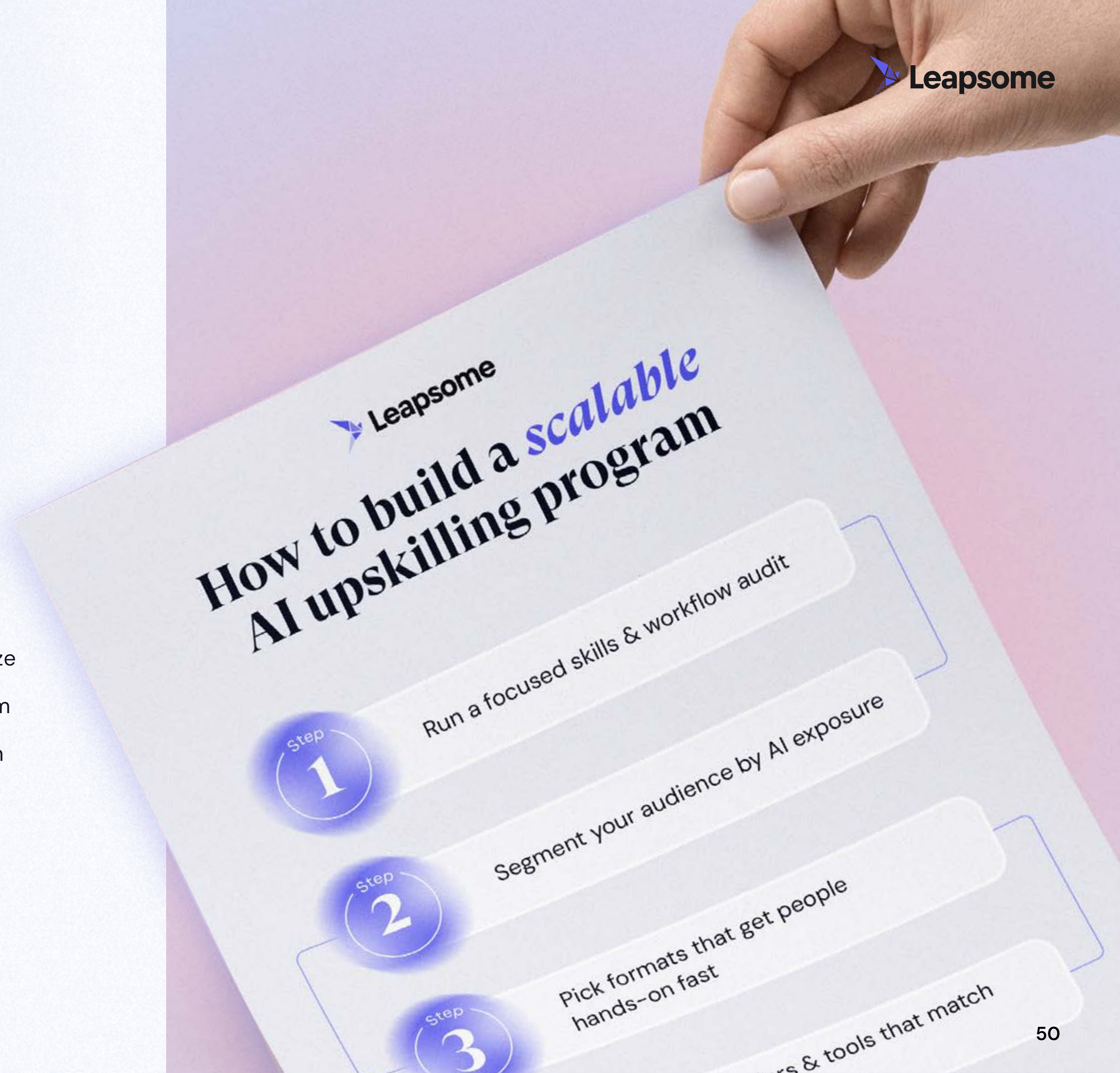
AI isn't replacing your people, but without the right skills, the gap between tools and outcomes will hold them back.

In just a few steps, this AI upskilling guide equips your teams with the confidence and know-how to work smarter, faster, and more responsibly.

What's inside

- The core technical, role-specific, and soft skills to prioritize
- **A 5-step framework** to build a scalable upskilling program
- Practical examples and quick wins to strengthen adoption

➤ [Read the full guide](#)



Build the *skills* your workforce needs to *thrive*

Leapsome's learning and development module gives employees access to the right training at the right time, so they can grow with AI — not get left behind.

Explore Leapsome Learning

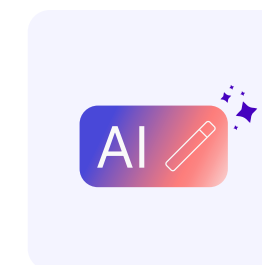
My courses



Austin Parker
Brand Manager

AI in the workplace

Course by Leapsome



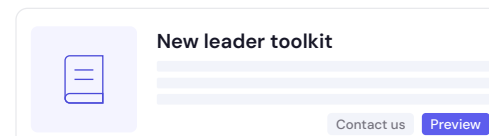
Course progress **86%**



▼ Course chapters

1. AI in the workplace
2. Concerns with AI
3. Bias in AI
4. AI disclosures

Learning marketplace



Trend #4 →

Trust in HR is under strain — but it can be renewed

From disconnection to direction: aligning people & business goals

HR has always been the employee's voice in the room *and* the business's voice to employees. The role is about balance: advocating for people while helping the organization succeed.

In people-centric companies, those goals often align. But when they don't, HR has the critical job of guiding and communicating decisions in a way that still protects understanding and trust.

In recent years, tough markets, AI upheaval, and forced RTO have made that balance harder. In some companies, employees now question whether HR teams can (or will) represent both people and the business.

Loss of trust rarely comes from one policy. It builds through difficult decisions, broken promises, and changes that add pressure without enough support. When HR is seen as only carrying out leadership's agenda, trust weakens, and even well-intentioned initiatives face skepticism.

But this dual role is also HR's strength. With openness about why decisions are made and clarity on how they benefit employees and the organization, HR can turn challenging moments into opportunities to strengthen confidence and engagement.

Over half of employees are not convinced HR advocates for them

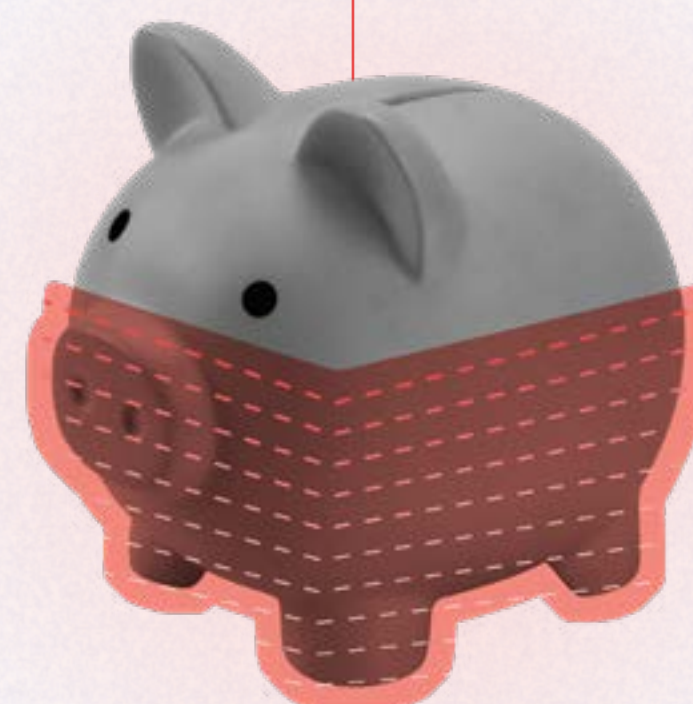
Even with the best intentions, HR teams often face budget constraints and operate under executive direction. When those realities aren't visible, employees start to question: Are policies there to support people, or to push them out? Is HR a strategic partner, or simply carrying out decisions from above?

The numbers reflect this tension and underscore the need for clearer communication about how decisions are made and why.

Lack of protection, lack of trust

49%

of HR leaders admit some cost-saving measures seem designed to **encourage employees to leave**



51%

of individual contributors are **not convinced HR can protect them** from policies that could be used to push people out



35%

of HR leaders are working with a **lower budget** than last year — when nearly half were already experiencing cuts

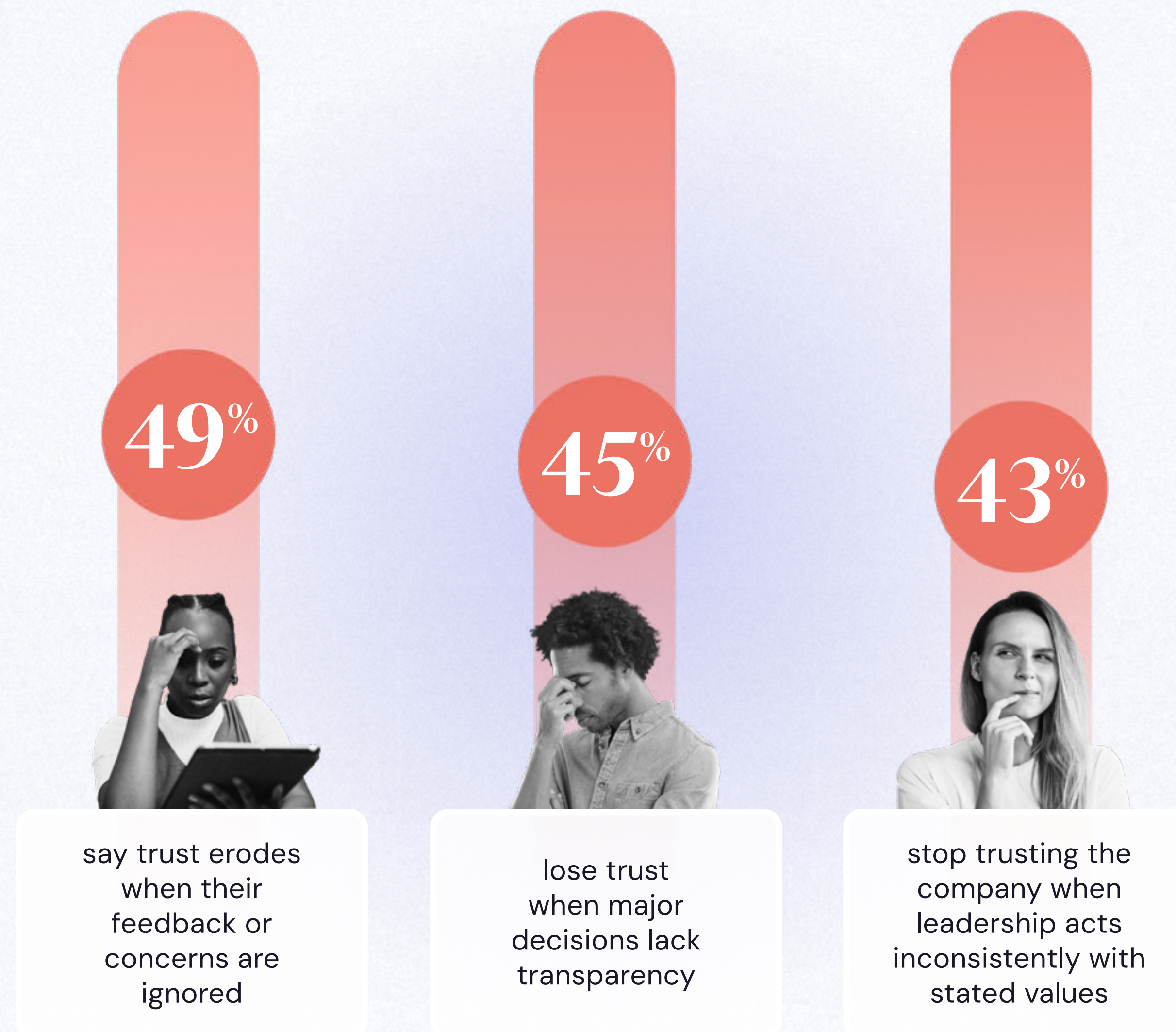


Top reasons employees lose trust in their company:

Employees lose *trust* when words don't match actions

The trust gap goes beyond HR; it shapes how employees view the entire company. Trust erodes when feedback is ignored, decisions lack explanation, or stated values aren't applied consistently.

When this happens, employees are more likely to disengage, look for other opportunities, and share negative experiences publicly — **putting retention and employer brand at risk.**



Company policies are sending the *wrong* message

When employees already feel unsure about HR and trust is shaken, top-down policies can deepen the doubt.

Return-to-office rules and budget cuts shape how employees read the company's priorities. When those choices suggest control is valued more than care, trust erodes and people start to question their future with the organization.

Lack of flexibility,
lack of trust

56%

of HR leaders say RTO policies give the impression the company prioritizes control over employee well-being

47%

of employees (managers and ICs) say recent changes, such as RTO or cost-saving measures, have made them question their long-term future at the company

Executive tensions leave employees feeling *unprotected*

As trust wears down, perception matters more than intent.

HR may take part in leadership debates, but when decisions arrive without context, **employees rarely see the pushback — only the enforcement.** That absence fuels doubt about HR's authority and leaves people feeling unprotected.

Lack of authority,
lack of trust

72%

of HR leaders
believe they can
challenge top-
down mandates
when necessary

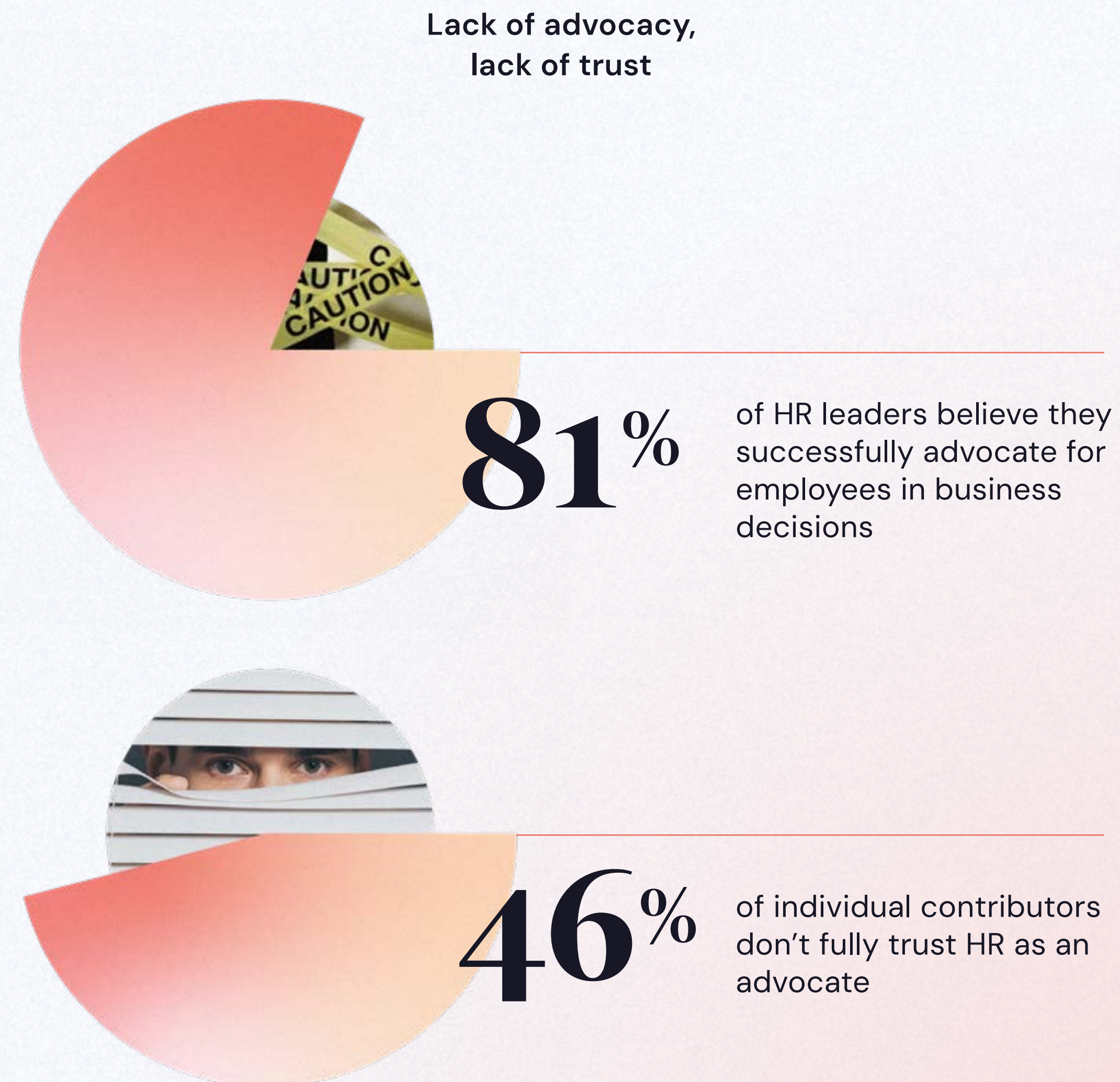
55%

of individual
contributors are
not convinced
HR has that
authority

Advocacy only builds trust if employees can *see* it

Most HR leaders believe they advocate for employees in critical decisions. Employees are less certain: fewer than half fully trust HR to play that role, with many neutral or unconvinced.

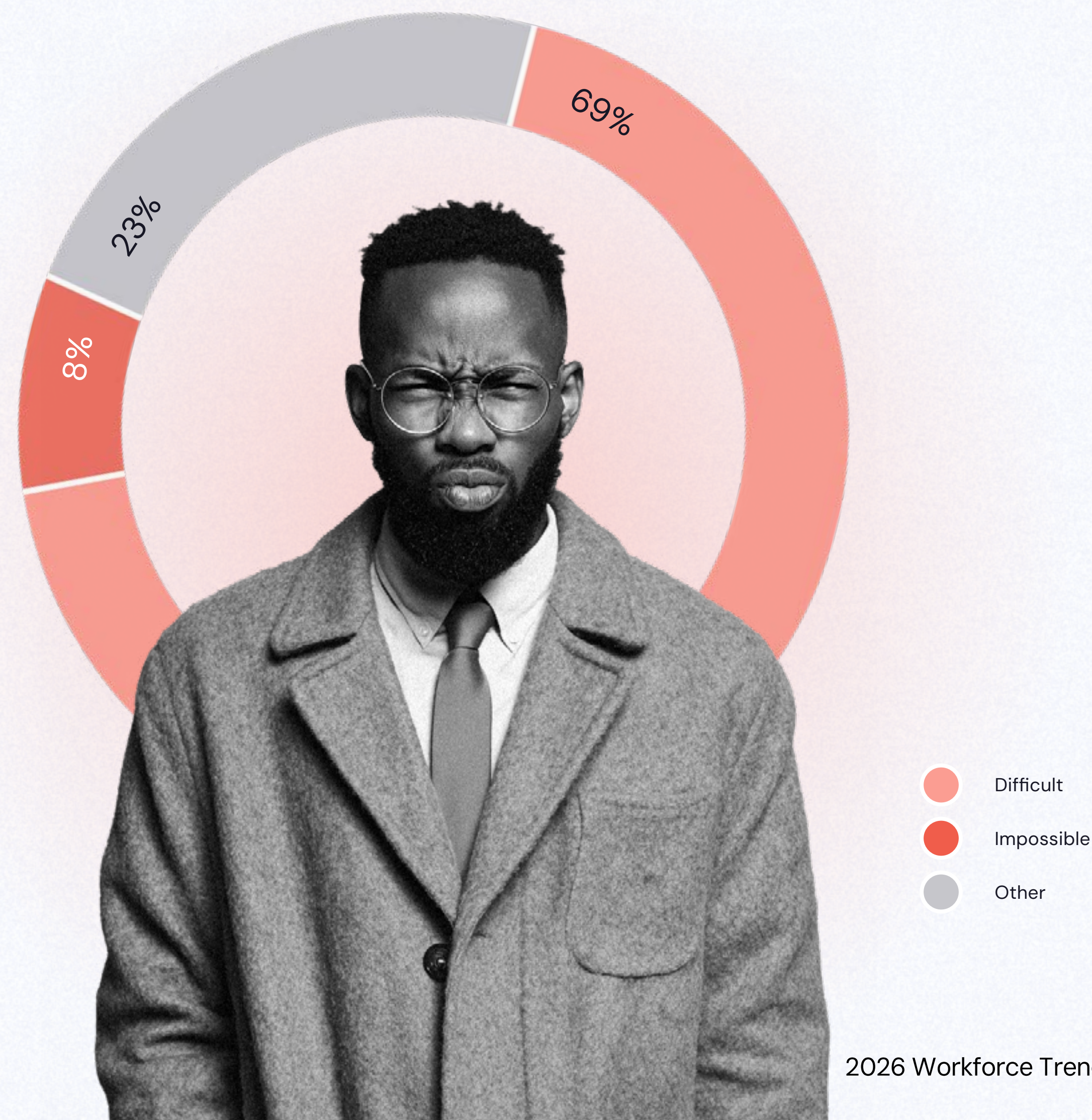
Without visible evidence of advocacy, uncertainty grows and trust weakens.



Employees say rebuilding trust *won't* be easy

Trust doesn't bounce back on its own. Most employees believe it's difficult to repair, but very few think it's impossible. That distinction matters: it shows change is still possible — but only if leaders take visible, consistent action.

ICs on how difficult it is to rebuild trust between companies and employees once it has been broken

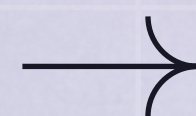


Turn insights into *action*

Rebuild trust by explaining the “why,” bringing employees into decisions, and closing the loop so people can see how their input shaped the outcome.

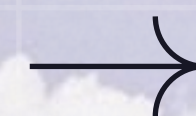
Bring employee voices into decisions

Involve employees in discussions that affect their work, and make clear how their input influenced the final call.



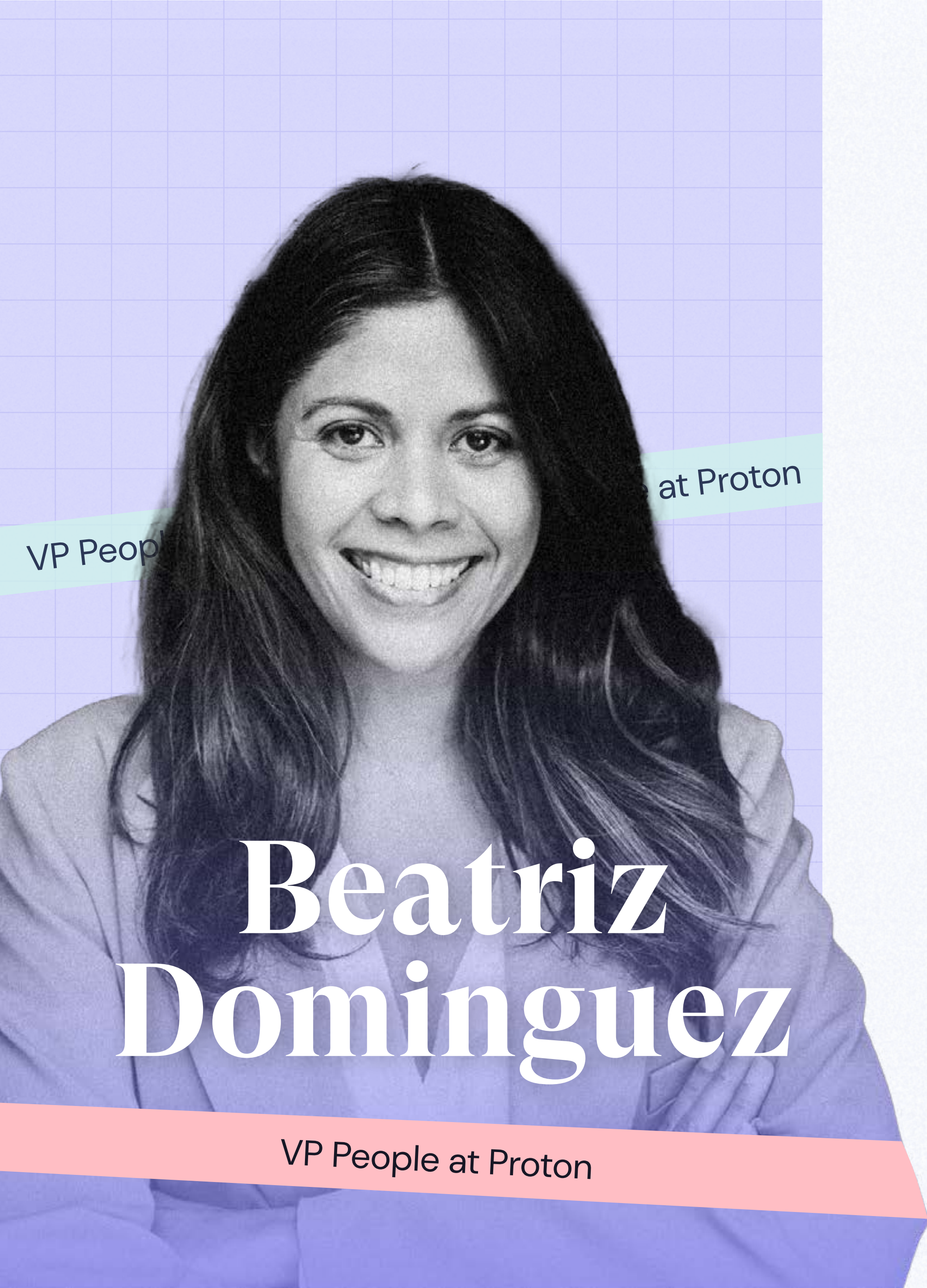
Shift from gatekeepers to enablers

Remove barriers, back employee-led improvements, and support changes that strengthen culture and day-to-day work.



Prove trust is worth rebuilding

Share the steps you’re taking to repair it, then follow through. Consistent, visible action — even in small wins — shows that change is real.



at Proton

How to foster *trust & engagement* in a lean, high-performing, high-stakes environment

After several years of an employee-driven market, the tide has shifted. Tech is no longer the perk-filled darling employer it once was. Instead, the industry is spending billions on replacing human workers. The rise (and fear) of AI-driven layoffs is real, and we're watching entry-level roles disappear against the backdrop of a tense global political and economic climate.

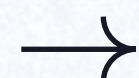
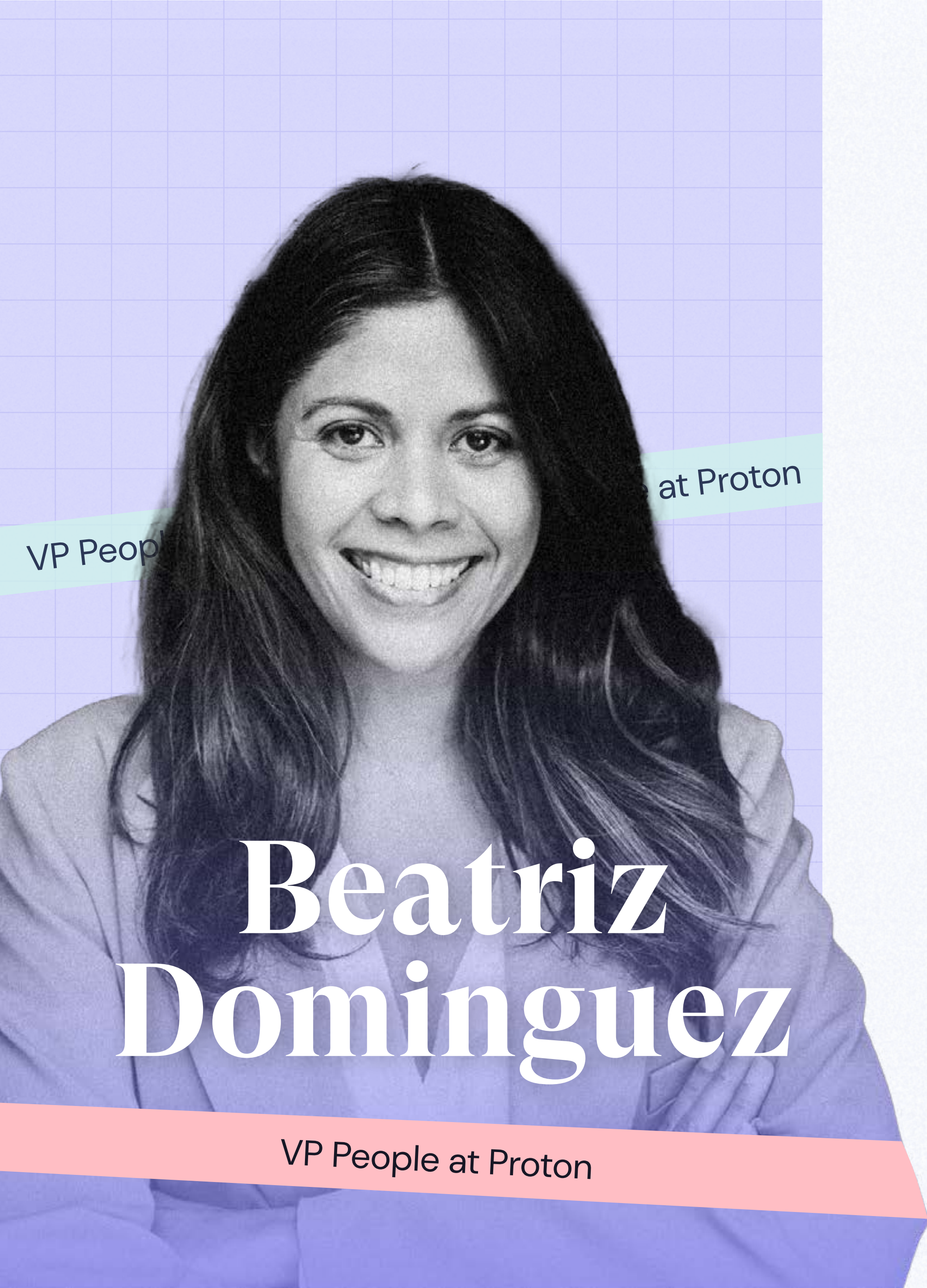
Applications are up, but outcomes aren't. **37% of professionals say they're applying to more jobs than ever** — but hearing back less.* At Proton, applications per opening have risen 30% year over year. While that gives us more control over headcount and compensation, the drop in external mobility can quickly lead to disengagement and lower performance.



*Source: LinkedIn Work Change Report 2025

Beatriz Dominguez

VP People at Proton



Here's how I foster trust and engagement in uncertain times:

1. Lead through authenticity and clarity, even when it's uncomfortable

Trust doesn't come from perfect conditions: it comes from truth-telling. We need to be candid about business challenges, market shifts, and expectations. The goal isn't to spread fear, but to remove ambiguity. Employees handle bad news better than they handle "spin."

2. Make *clarity* the new kindness

Lack of clarity kills productivity. High-performing teams crave clear goals, feedback, and career trajectories — even if the message is "Your promotion path may take longer" or "Salary increases won't happen every year." Being upfront prevents resentment and rumor mills from taking over.

3. Redefine engagement as belonging and purpose

Flashy perks can't replace meaning. What keeps people is a team they're proud of, a mission that feels relevant, and a place where their voice matters. We make this real by tying team goals to company mission and regularly spotlighting recognition.

In the end, the goal isn't to convince people they're lucky to have a job, but to help them see that their contributions matter. Treat employees like placeholders, and they'll act like it. Treat them like they're building something meaningful (even in a rough season) and they'll rise to that belief.

VP People at Proton

Beatriz Dominguez

VP People at Proton



A framework for *rebuilding* confidence

One way to think about this challenge is through the **CHARGE®** model, which highlights six traits HR leaders can lean on:

Courage — name disruptions openly rather than downplaying them

Humility — listen, co-create, and acknowledge when things need to change

Accuracy — provide clarity on priorities, expectations, and decisions

Resilience — pace change and protect energy, rather than pushing harder

Goal-oriented — connect organizational outcomes with personal impact

Exemplary — model the same standards and behaviors expected of others

These aren't abstract ideals — they're practical traits HR leaders can use to **rebuild trust and strengthen credibility** in the year ahead.

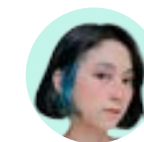
Read more about the CHARGE® model in Keri's book [*The Way of the HR Warrior*](#)

Rebuild *trust* with transparency, consistency & AI insight

Leapsome's AI-enhanced surveys, anonymous suggestion board, and analytics help HR leaders uncover insights faster, act with consistency, and close the loop on decisions that matter.

[Explore Leapsome Surveys](#)

Company surveys

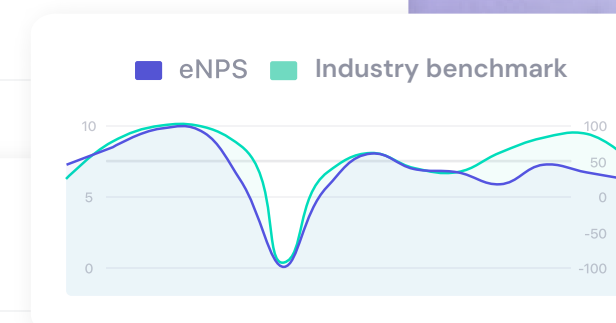


Keira Cho
Frontend Developer

Engagement pulse survey

Filter by team ▾ All offices ▾

	SALES	PRODUCT	FINANCE
The work I do is meaningful	2.34 / 5	3.95 / 5	4.66 / 5
I feel I am part of a team	3.12 / 5	4.87 / 5	4.11 / 5
Workload manageable	1.11 / 5	2.55 / 5	3.4 / 5



Submit your question
Anonymously

Write your question...

Submit anonymously



Marketing team engagement
dropped 5% this month

Setting sights on 2026

This year's trends point to one story: the pace of change is accelerating, and employees can't navigate it alone. **HR is the function best positioned to guide that transition** — connecting people's needs with the organization's goals, and making change feel both manageable and meaningful.

Many want to grow but feel stuck in roles that no longer fit. AI is reshaping work faster than companies can adapt, piling pressure onto leaner teams. And while HR leaders are asked to manage cost and complexity, trust slips when decisions arrive without explanation or follow-through.

The good news is that each of these challenges can be addressed with the same foundation: listen closely, act on what you hear, and build systems that put people at the center of change.

In practice, it means:

- **Helping employees see a path forward** with meaningful growth opportunities and support
- **Introducing AI with integrity**, defined ownership, and training that builds confidence
- **Communicating tough decisions** with transparency, explaining trade-offs and committing to next steps

With the right approach and tools, HR can guide organizations through disruption with purpose. In moments of complexity, People teams can build alignment. When change accelerates, they can ensure progress is sustainable and doesn't come at the expense of people.

How Leapsome can support you in 2026

Leapsome unifies HRIS, performance, and engagement in one AI-enabled platform.

We lighten the admin load so HR teams can focus on building trust, supporting growth, and driving impact with their people.

Chat with an expert

