



# HR BAROMETER 2026

Edition 12

2026 REPORT ON HRM TRENDS AND  
CHALLENGES IN BELGIAN  
ORGANISATIONS



## Dear HR professional

For the 12<sup>th</sup> year in a row, Vlerick Business School and Hudson have conducted **the HR Barometer**, a study examining current HR trends and challenges. The study provides insight into the HR priorities of leading companies operating in Belgium.

The HR Barometer is an annual initiative and comprises two parts. The first (stable) part focuses on **the strategic importance of different HR practices** by investigating the **priority** and **mastery** levels of 25 HR domains. In the second (variable) part, we focus on a specific challenge that is gaining momentum. This year we focus on **The Future of HR**.

This report was created by **the Strategic Talent Management Centre** (Vlerick Business School and Hudson). It contains an overview of the most important findings from the 2026 study. We hope this report will provide you with interesting and useful insights!

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The HR Barometer is a research project initiated by the Strategic Talent Management Centre of Vlerick Business School and Hudson.



FIND OUT MORE >

## WHO WE ARE

> We are a **knowledge-driven network** with over 20 years of expertise and on a mission to put talent management on the map as a strategic decision science in organisations.

## WHAT WE DO

> Achieve **thought leadership** in strategic talent management.

*We continuously monitor our field to stay ahead of new research, trends and business solutions.*

> Be the **gatekeeper between theory & practice** in our field.

*We provide relevant and evidence-based solutions to talent management challenges.*

> **Accumulate knowledge** in our field across industries via research & tool development.

*Together with our member organisations, we develop, share and validate knowledge and good practices.*

> Build an impactful **community**.

*We facilitate networking through workshops, roundtable sessions, webinars, etc.*

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# 1. METHODOLOGY & SAMPLE

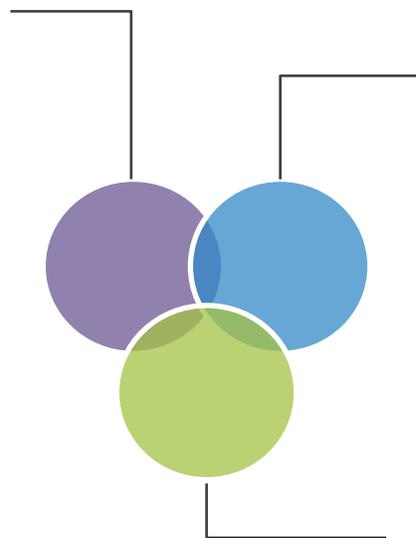


# METHODOLOGY

## Research design

- Online survey
- Target population:  
**250 largest\* organisations in Belgium** (including BEL 20)
- Target audience:  
**CHROs/HR Directors**
- Broad spectrum of industries

*\*company size measured by employee headcount*



## Sample

- More than 1/2 of the target population participated  
**(N = 132)**

## Data collection

- January - February 2026

# HR BAROMETER SURVEY



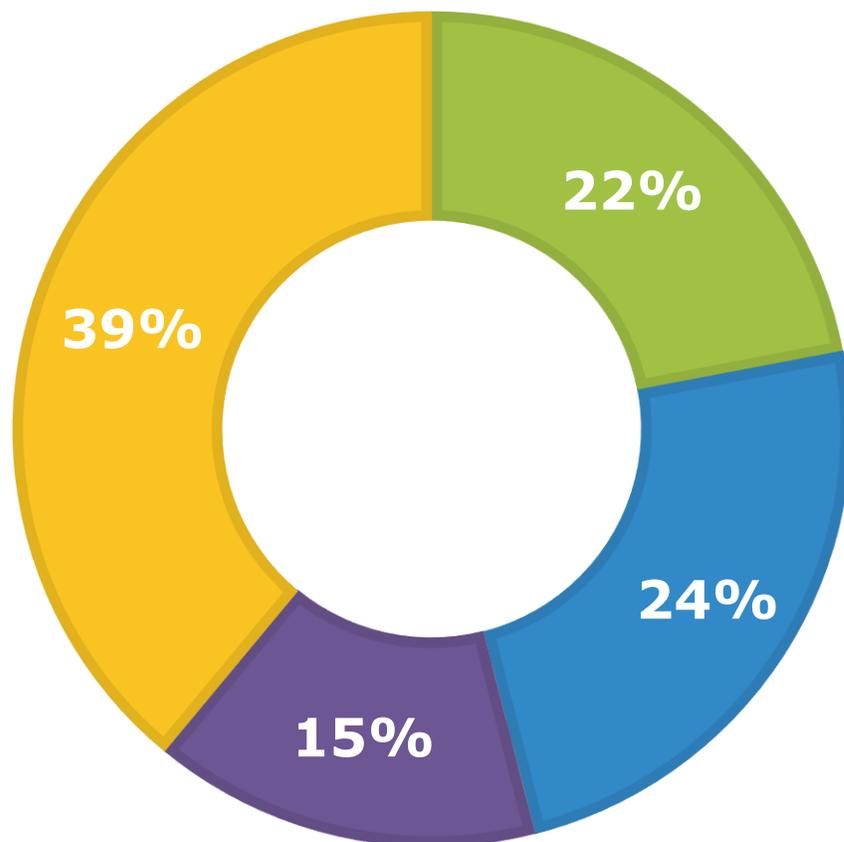
Looking back at the past year (2025), HR leaders indicate the **priority** of 25 HR practices and how well they **master** these practices.



Each year, we explore a specific HR practice that is gaining momentum. This year, we focus on **The Future of HR.**

# SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

## A. Number of employees in Belgium

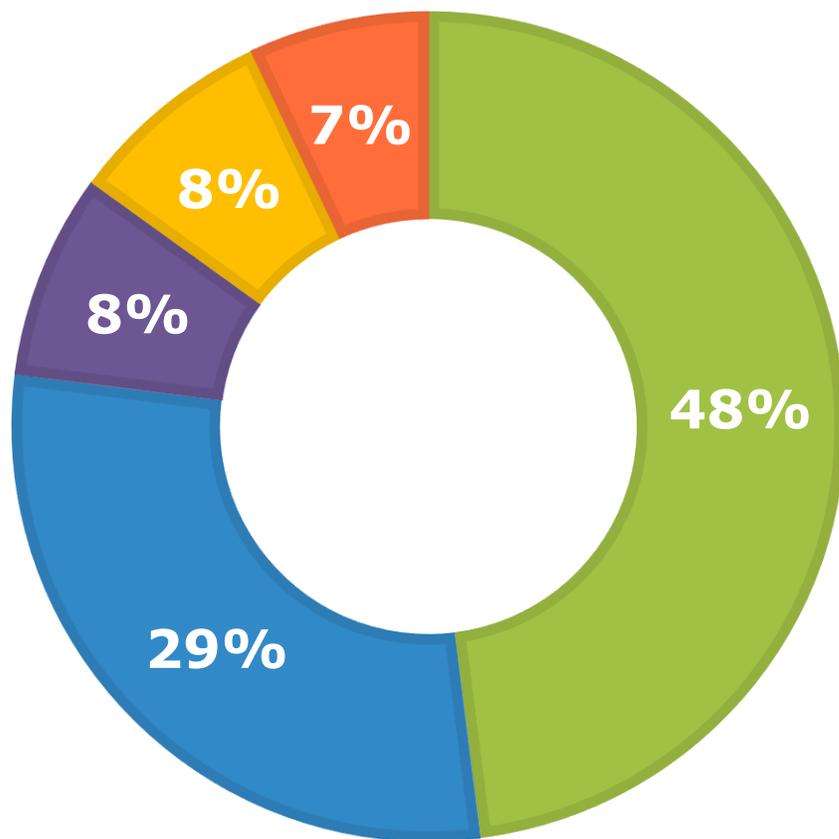


- < 1.000 employees
- 1.000 - 1.500 employees
- 1.501 - 2.000 employees
- > 2.000 employees

Total number of employees represented by all organisations in our sample: > **376.000**

# SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

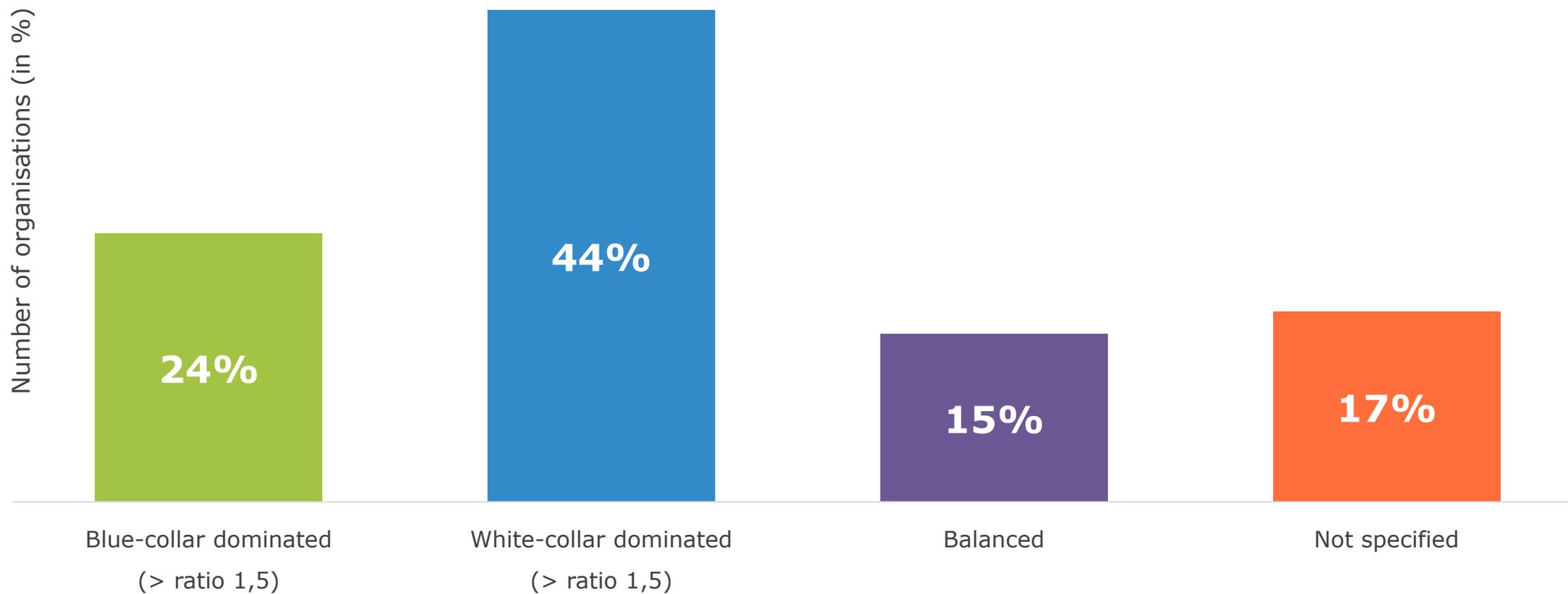
## B. Number of employees internationally (incl. Belgium)



- < 5.000 employees
- 5.000 - 25.000 employees
- 25.001 - 50.000 employees
- 50.001 - 150.000 employees
- > 150.000 employees

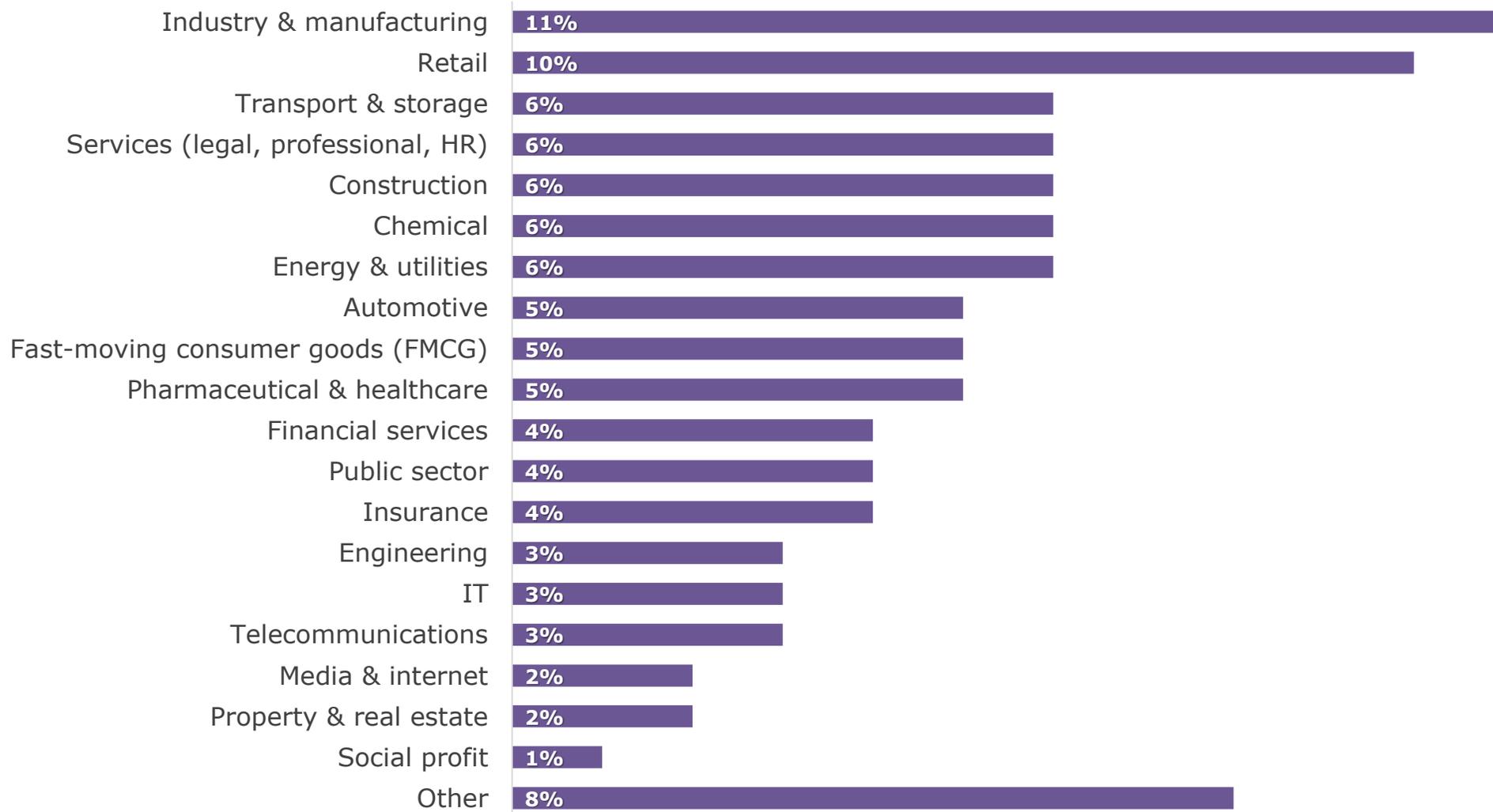
# SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

## C. Proportion of blue- & white-collar employees



# SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

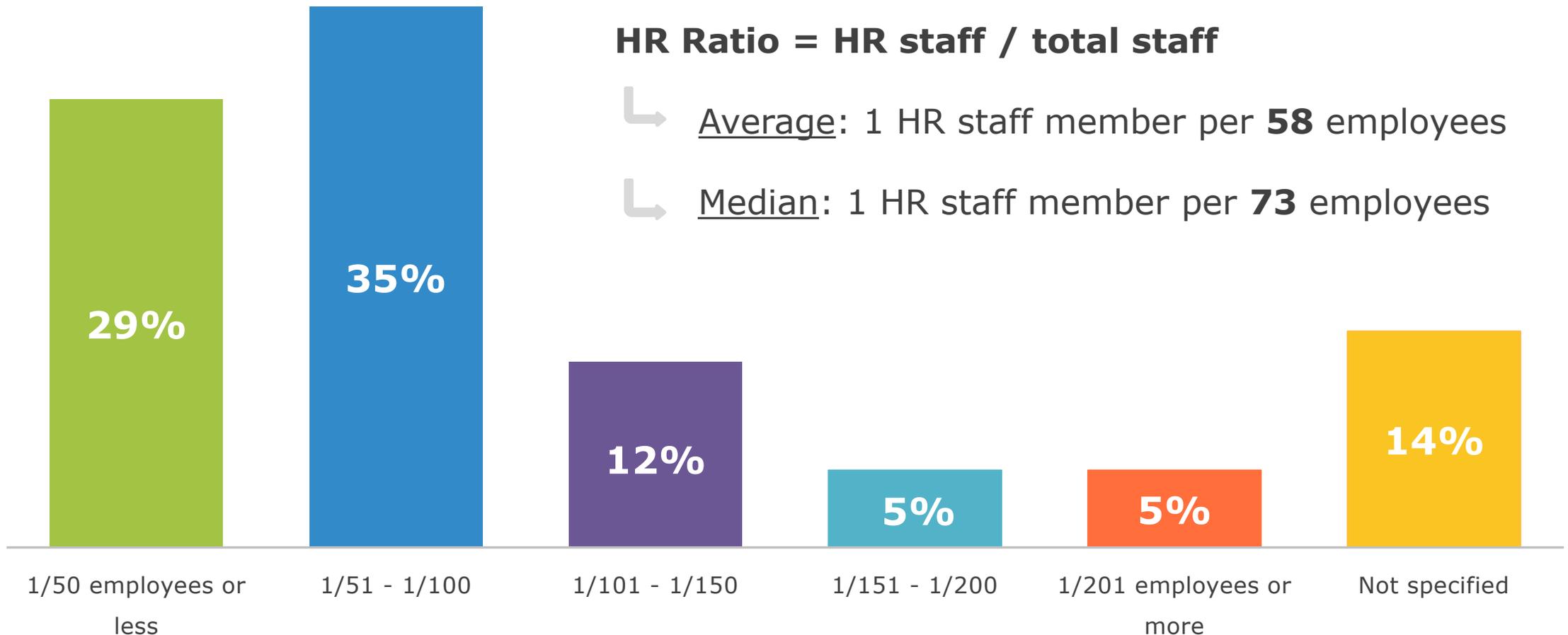
## D. Sector



# SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

## E. Ratio of HR staff to employees

Number of organisations (in %)



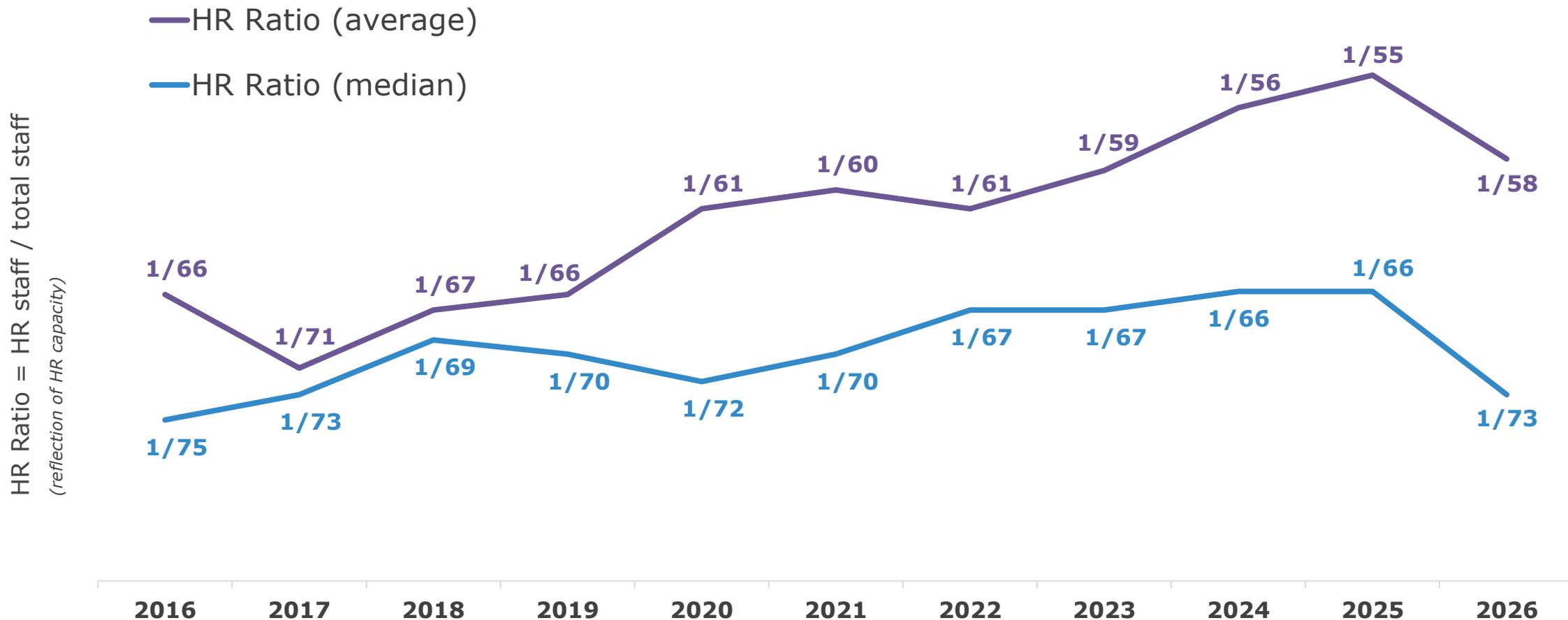
**HR Ratio = HR staff / total staff**

↳ Average: 1 HR staff member per **58** employees

↳ Median: 1 HR staff member per **73** employees

# EVOLUTION OF HR RATIO OVER TIME

## HR BAROMETER 2016 - 2026



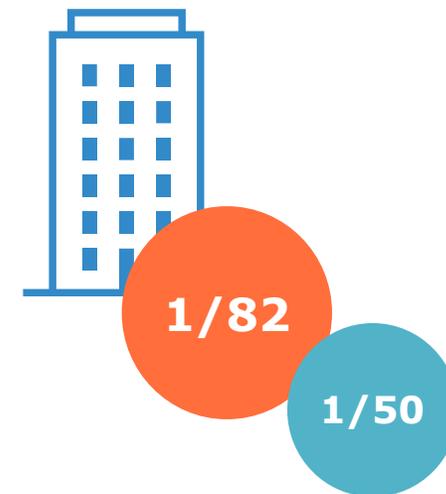
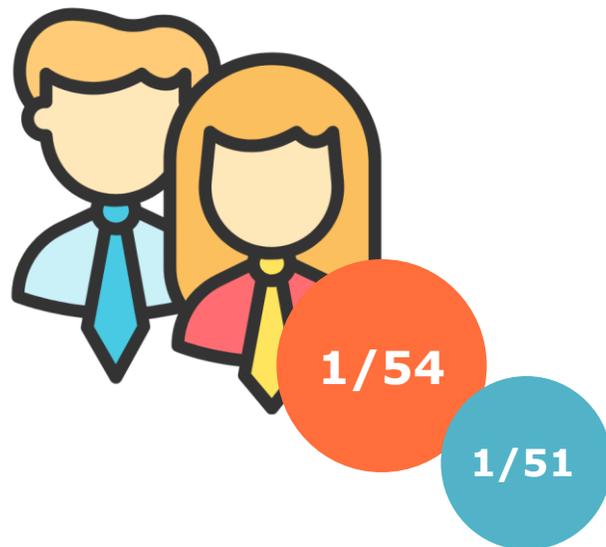
# HR RATIO (MEDIAN) ACROSS WORKFORCE TYPE AND COMPANY SIZE

Organisations dominated by **blue-collar** population

Organisations dominated by **white-collar** population

**Largest** organisations (≥ 2000 employees)

**Smallest** organisations (≤ 1000 employees)



HR Barometer 2026

HR Barometer 2024

Number of employees per HR staff member



## 2. HR BAROMETER RESULTS 2026

# HR BAROMETER RESULTS 2026

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## 2. HR BAROMETER RESULTS 2026

### I. HR PRIORITY

### II. HR MASTERY

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### IV. PRIORITIES FOR 2026

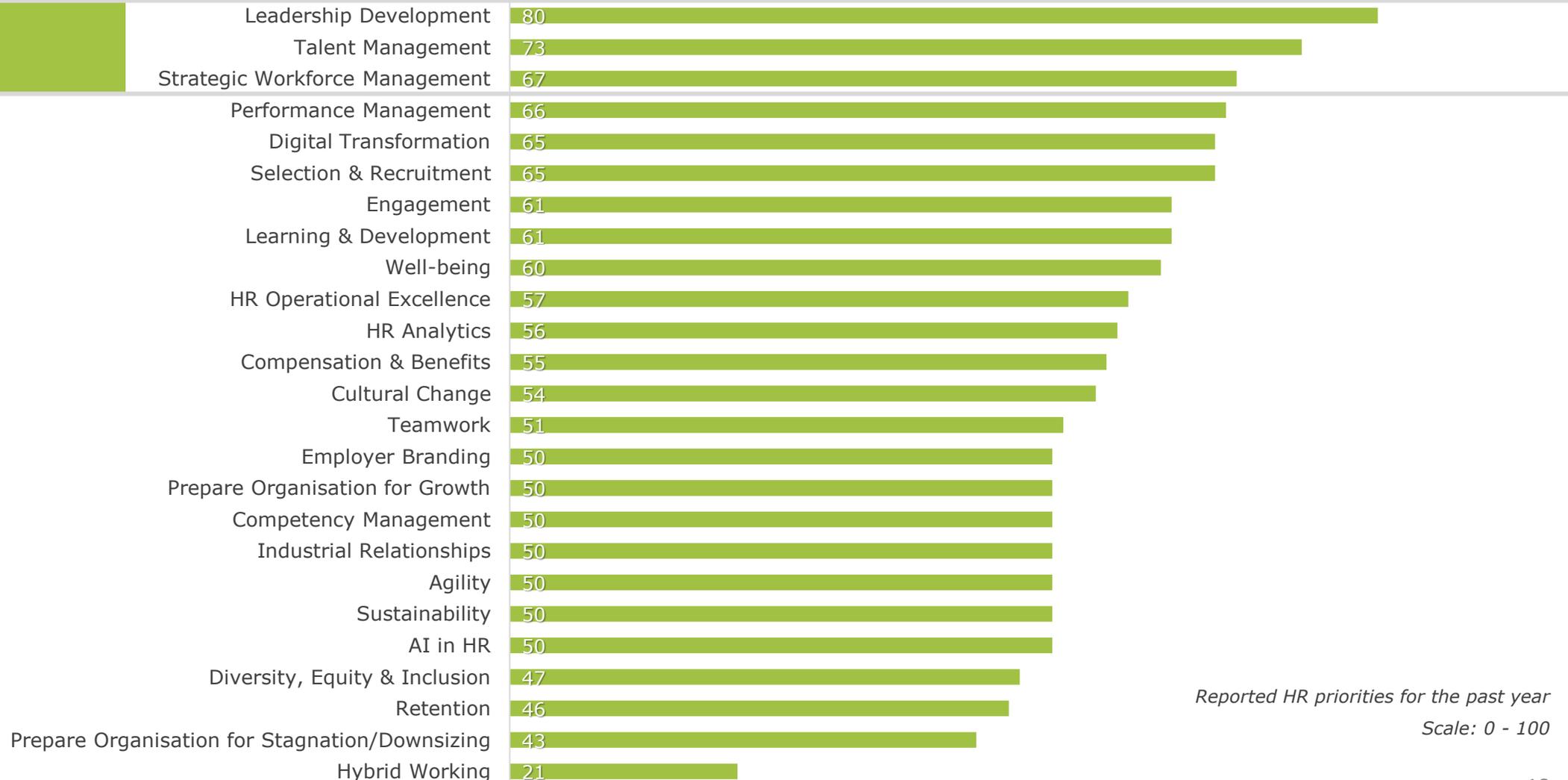
# I. HR PRIORITY



# HR BAROMETER 2026: HR PRIORITY

"Looking back at the past 12 months (Jan-Dec 2025), please indicate the priority level for each HR domain"

## TOP 3 PRIORITIES



Reported HR priorities for the past year

Scale: 0 - 100

# HR PRIORITY x HR RATIO

- Organisations that prioritise HR domains such as **Preparing the Organisation for Growth** ( $r = .288^{**}$ ) and **Teamwork** ( $r = .206^*$ ) generally have greater HR capacity (higher HR ratio).
- In contrast, organisations that focus on **Preparing the Organisation for Stagnation/Downsizing** ( $r = -.205^*$ ) tend to have lower HR capacity (lower HR ratio).
- No significant relationship was found between prioritising **Digital Transformation** and HR capacity ( $r = .036$ ), suggesting that greater investment in digital transformation is unrelated to the size of the HR department.



# TRENDS IN HR PRIORITIES

## HR BAROMETER 2025 versus 2026

—● Reported priority HR Barometer 2025  
—● Reported priority HR Barometer 2026



# TRENDS IN HR PRIORITIES

## HR BAROMETER 2025 versus 2026

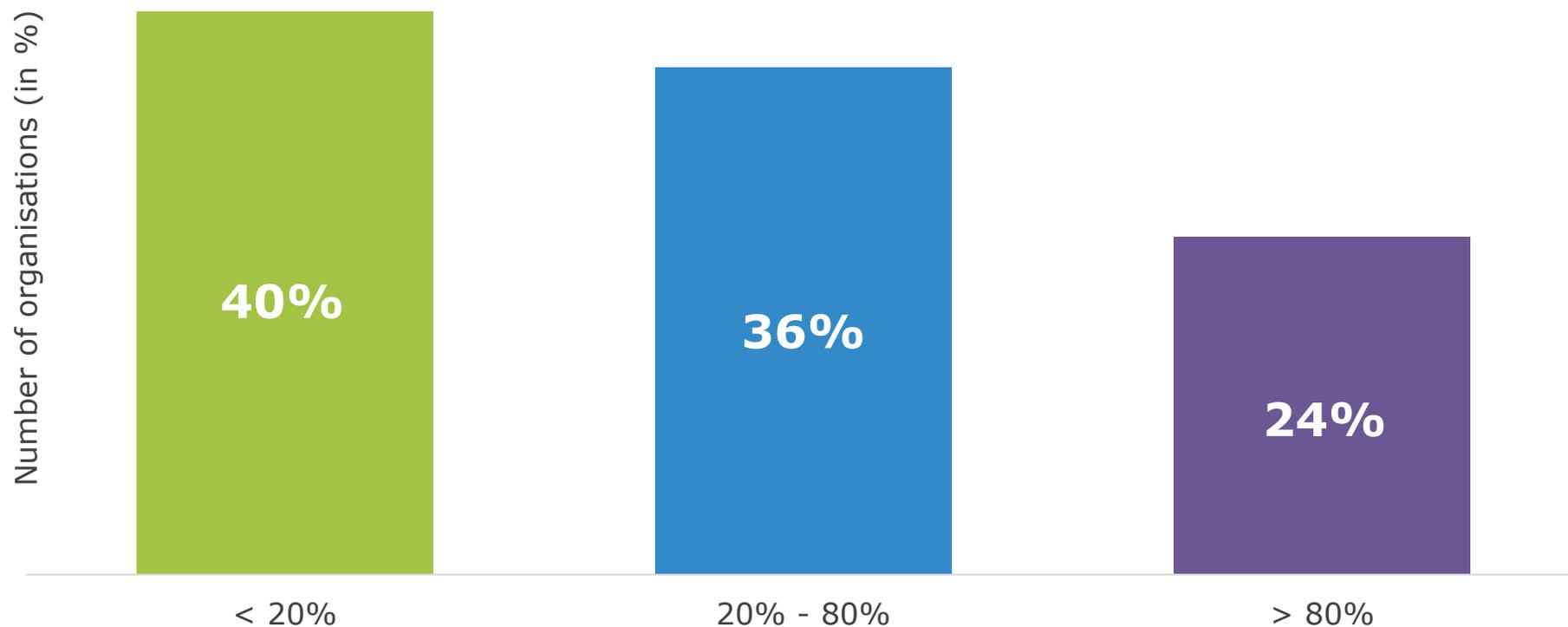


<b>Prepare Organisation for Stagnation/Downsizing</b>	<b>+28</b>
<b>Strategic Workforce Management</b>	<b>+15</b>
AI in HR	+9
HR Analytics	+5
Talent Management	+2
Performance Management	+1

<b>Learning &amp; Development</b>	<b>-14</b>
<b>Employer Branding</b>	<b>-11</b>
<b>Selection &amp; Recruitment</b>	<b>-10</b>
Engagement	-9
Cultural Change	-7
Retention	-6
Sustainability	-5
Digital Transformation	-5
Well-being	-5



# A CLOSER LOOK: PREPARING THE ORGANISATION FOR STAGNATION/DOWNSIZING AS HR PRIORITY



*Distribution of organisations based on priority level indicated by HR Directors (scale: 0% = no priority - 100% = top priority)*

# A CLOSER LOOK: PREPARING THE ORGANISATION FOR STAGNATION/DOWNSIZING AS HR PRIORITY

- Although Preparing the Organisation for Stagnation/Downsizing has seen the strongest increase in priority score, it remains a relatively low priority for most companies. Organisations active in the **Retail, Industry & Manufacturing**, and **Chemical** sectors are notable exceptions, assigning higher priority to this HR practice.
- Organisations that prioritise Preparing the Organisation for Stagnation/Downsizing generally ...
  - ... place less emphasis on growth-oriented HR areas such as **Recruitment & Selection** ( $r = -.355^{**}$ ) and **Learning & Development** ( $r = -.193^*$ ).
  - ... show a stronger focus on areas like **HR Analytics** ( $r = .246^{**}$ ), **HR Operational Excellence** ( $r = .227^{**}$ ), **Cultural Change** ( $r = .230^{**}$ ), and **Industrial Relations** ( $r = .283^{**}$ ).
- There appears to be no relationship with **Digital Transformation** ( $r = .073$ ), suggesting that decisions about technology adoption are largely independent of whether an organisation is preparing for stagnation/downsizing.



## II. HR MASTERY



# HR BAROMETER 2026: HR MASTERY

"Looking back at the past 12 months (Jan-Dec 2025), please indicate how well you master each HR domain"

## TOP 3 MASTERY



# TRENDS IN HR MASTERY

## HR BAROMETER 2025 versus 2026

—● Reported mastery HR Barometer 2025  
—● Reported mastery HR Barometer 2026



# TRENDS IN HR MASTERY

## HR BAROMETER 2025 versus 2026



<b>Prepare Organisation for Stagnation/Downsizing</b>	<b>+11</b>
<b>Retention</b>	<b>+10</b>
Performance Management	+8
Teamwork	+8
Engagement	+5
Strategic Workforce Management	+5
Sustainability	+5
Leadership Development	+5
AI in HR	+5

<b>Hybrid Working</b>	<b>-5</b>
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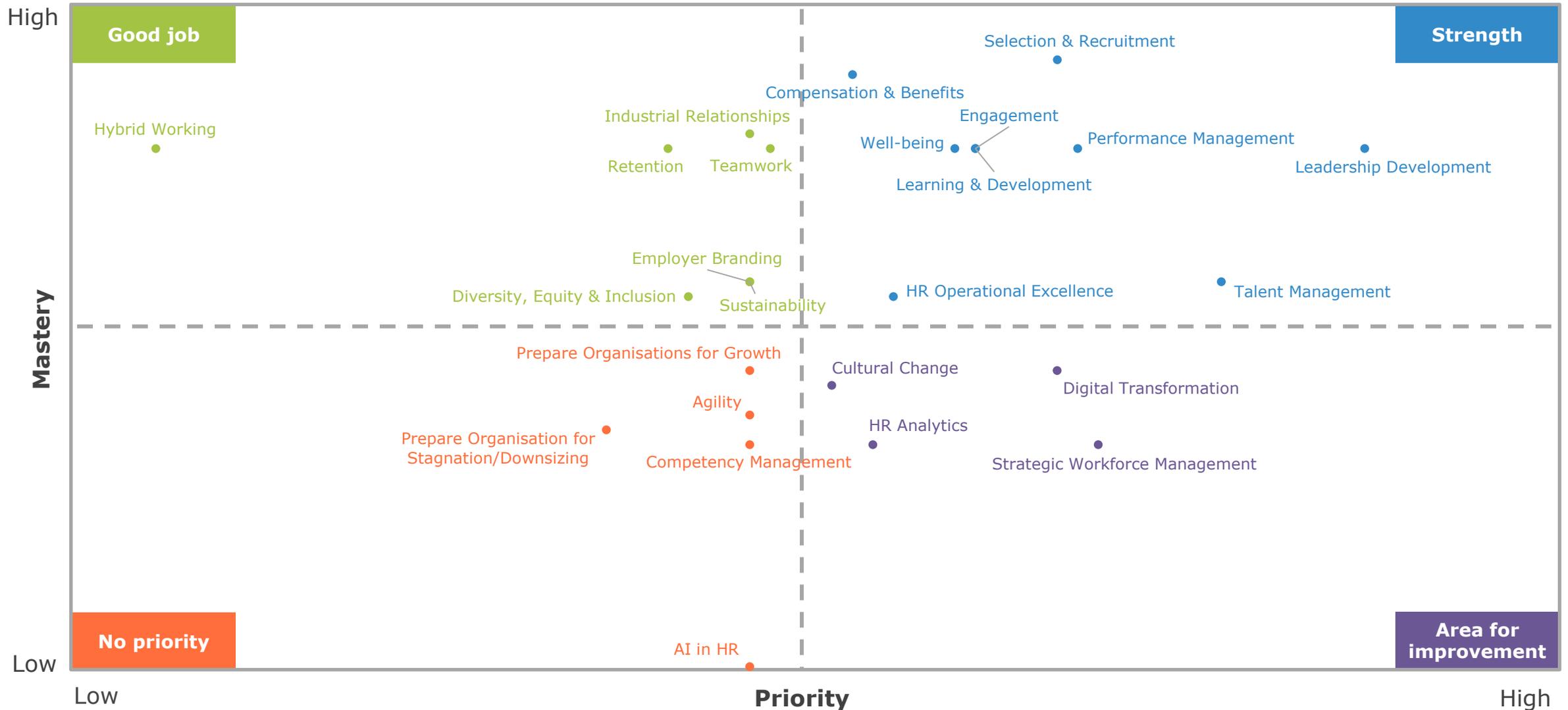
HR Directors report growing mastery across nearly all HR domains, suggesting **further professionalisation?**



# III. HR PRIORITY x HR MASTERY

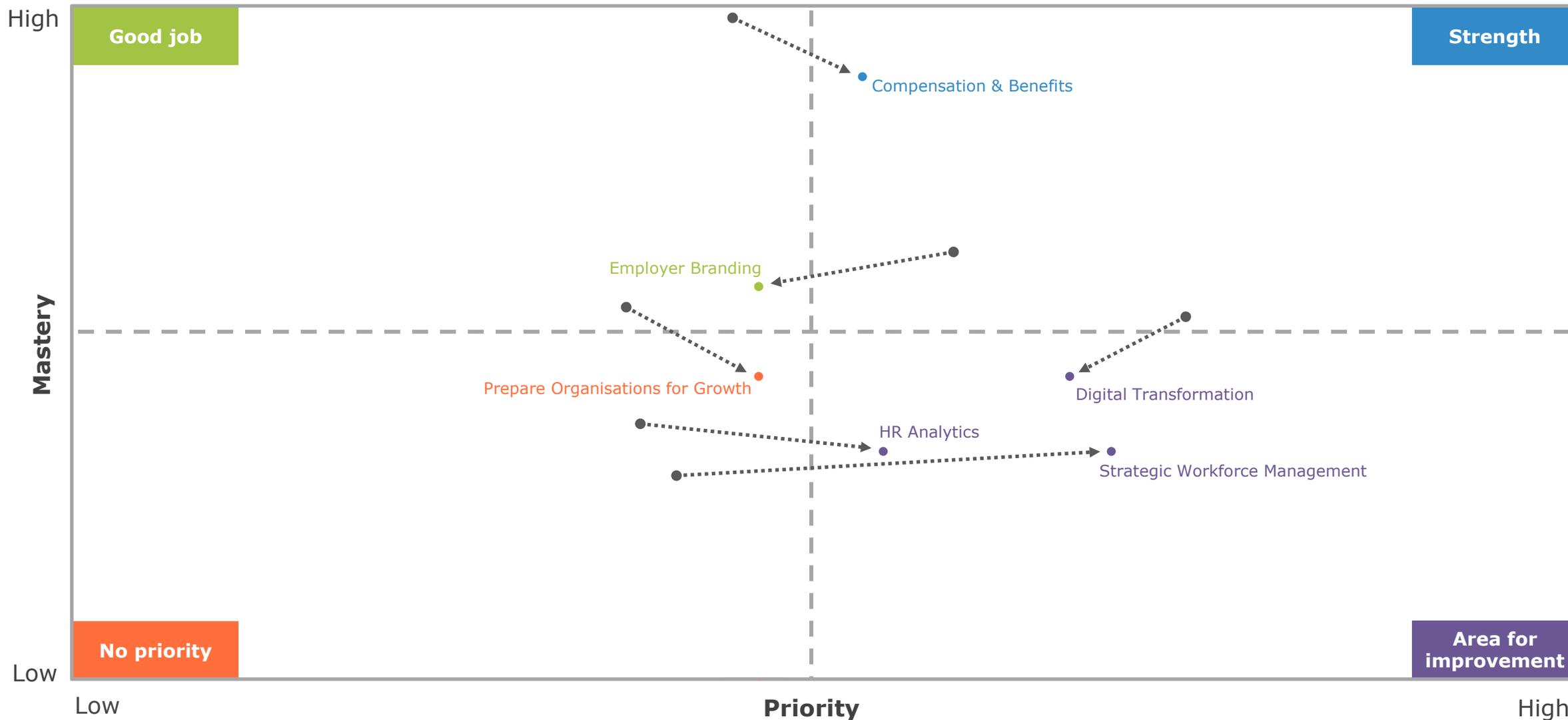


# HR BAROMETER 2026: HR PRIORITY x HR MASTERY



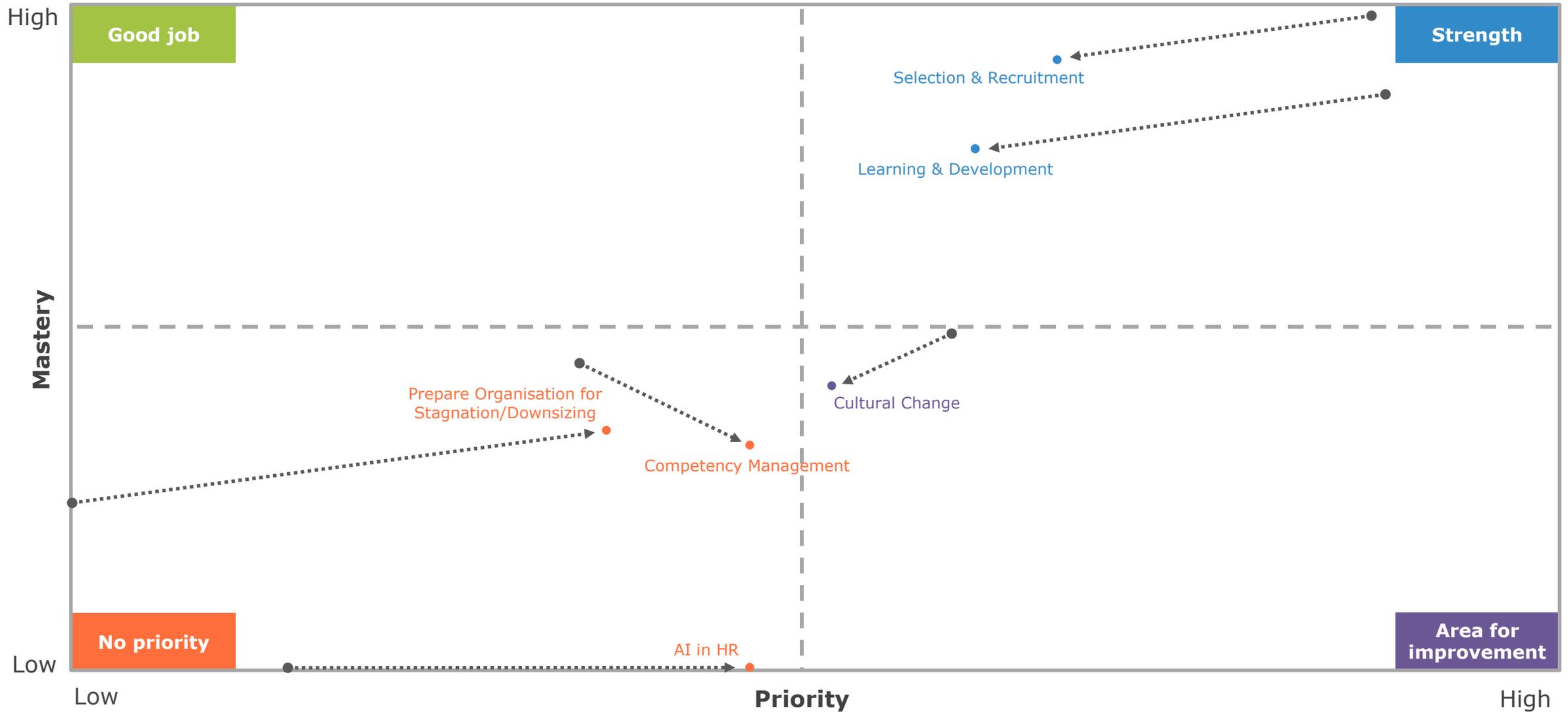
# CHANGES ACROSS QUADRANTS

## HR BAROMETER 2025 versus 2026



# CHANGES WITHIN QUADRANTS

## HR BAROMETER 2025 versus 2026

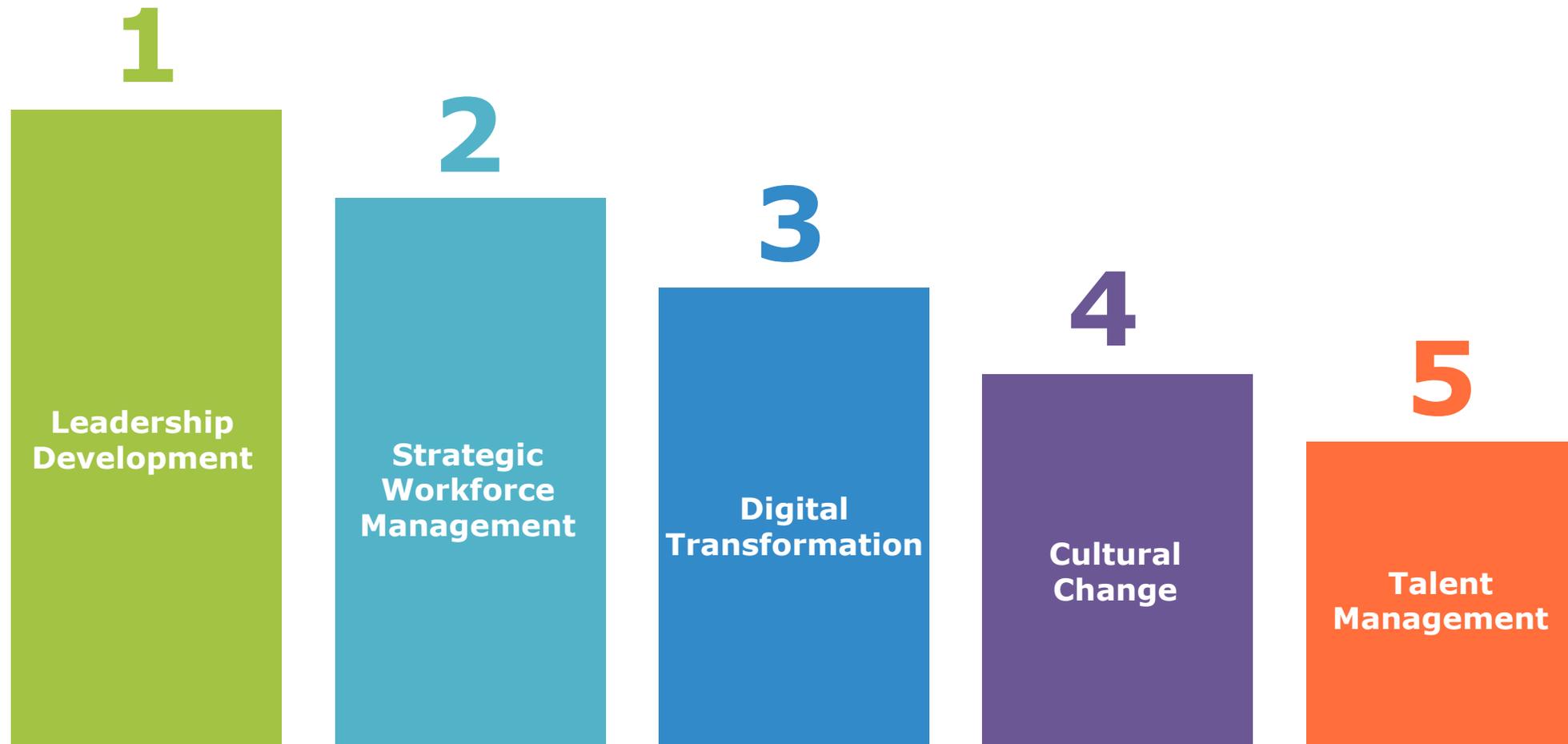




# **IV. PRIORITIES FOR 2026**

# PLANNED PRIORITIES FOR 2026

*"Please indicate your top 5 HR priorities for 2026"*



# PLANNED PRIORITIES OVER TIME

- **Leadership Development** is once again the number one planned priority for the coming year. Last year's planned top priority was fully confirmed: it also became the actual number one priority in 2025.
- **Selection & Recruitment** and **Learning & Development** fall out of the top 5 planned priorities for the first time. This decline is also noticed in the actual priorities for 2025 but not anticipated at that time.
- **Cultural Change**, planned as a top 5 priority for both 2025 (N°3) and the coming year (N°4) dropped dramatically to rank 13 in the actual 2025 priorities list. This reflects a misalignment between plans and reality and raises the question of whether HR is overestimating its ability to prioritise cultural change? While HR Directors consistently place it high on the agenda, in practice HR tends to focus on other more pressing matters.





**3.  
SPOTLIGHT ON  
THE FUTURE OF HR**

# SPOTLIGHT ON THE FUTURE OF HR

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### 3. SPOTLIGHT ON THE FUTURE OF HR

**I. THE FUTURE OF YOUR HR DEPARTMENT**

**II. THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE CHRO**

# I. THE FUTURE OF YOUR HR DEPARTMENT



# HR'S CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES

## CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

*HR contributes to ...*

... the organisational strategy as a strategic business partner

... business results as an operational business partner

... continuous organisational change

... the development of the company culture

... a future-ready organisational structure

... a strong employer brand

... a positive employee experience

... sustainability and ESG performance

... digital transformation across the organisation

... evidence-based decision-making across the organisation

... a physically healthy workforce

... a mentally healthy workforce

... innovation across the organisation

... a reskilled and upskilled workforce

... a diverse, equitable and inclusive organisation

... a flexible and blended workforce (e.g. mix of permanent employees, freelancers, consultants, etc.)

... strategic decisions regarding global workforce allocation (e.g. near- and offshoring)

## EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION

*HR needs to contribute to ...*

*For all 17 organisational outcomes, both current and expected contributions were assessed*

# CURRENT CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES

"To what extent does your HR department currently contribute to the following organisational outcomes?"

## HR contributes to ...



Average score indicated by HR Directors on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all, 5 = to a very large extent)

# CURRENT CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES

"To what extent does your HR department currently contribute to the following organisational outcomes?"

## TOP 5

## BOTTOM 5



Top and bottom 5 current contribution areas indicated by HR Directors

# EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES

"Which organisational outcomes does the executive board consider most important for your HR department to contribute to in the next five years?"

## HR needs to contribute to ...



Weighted sum score based on top 5 priorities indicated by HR Directors (higher scores indicate a higher priority level)

# EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES

"Which organisational outcomes does the executive board consider most important for your HR department to contribute to in the next five years?"

## TOP 5

## BOTTOM 5



1	The organisational strategy
2	Continuous organisational change
3	A reskilled and upskilled workforce
4	The development of the company culture
5	Business results

13	Evidence-based decision-making across the organisation
14	A diverse, equitable and inclusive organisation
15	A physically healthy workforce
16	Innovation across the organisation
17	Sustainability and ESG performance



Top and bottom 5 expected contribution areas indicated by HR Directors

# EXPECTED VERSUS CURRENT CONTRIBUTION AREAS

## TOP 5

## BOTTOM 5



1	The organisational strategy	N°4
2	Continuous organisational change	N°2
3	A reskilled and upskilled workforce	N°7
4	The development of the company culture	N°1
5	Business results	N°7

13	Evidence-based decision-making across the organisation	N°13
14	A diverse, equitable and inclusive organisation	N°10
15	A physically healthy workforce	N°11
16	Innovation across the organisation	N°17
17	Sustainability and ESG performance	N°16



Top and bottom 5 organisational outcomes based on expected contribution versus their ranking in terms of current contribution

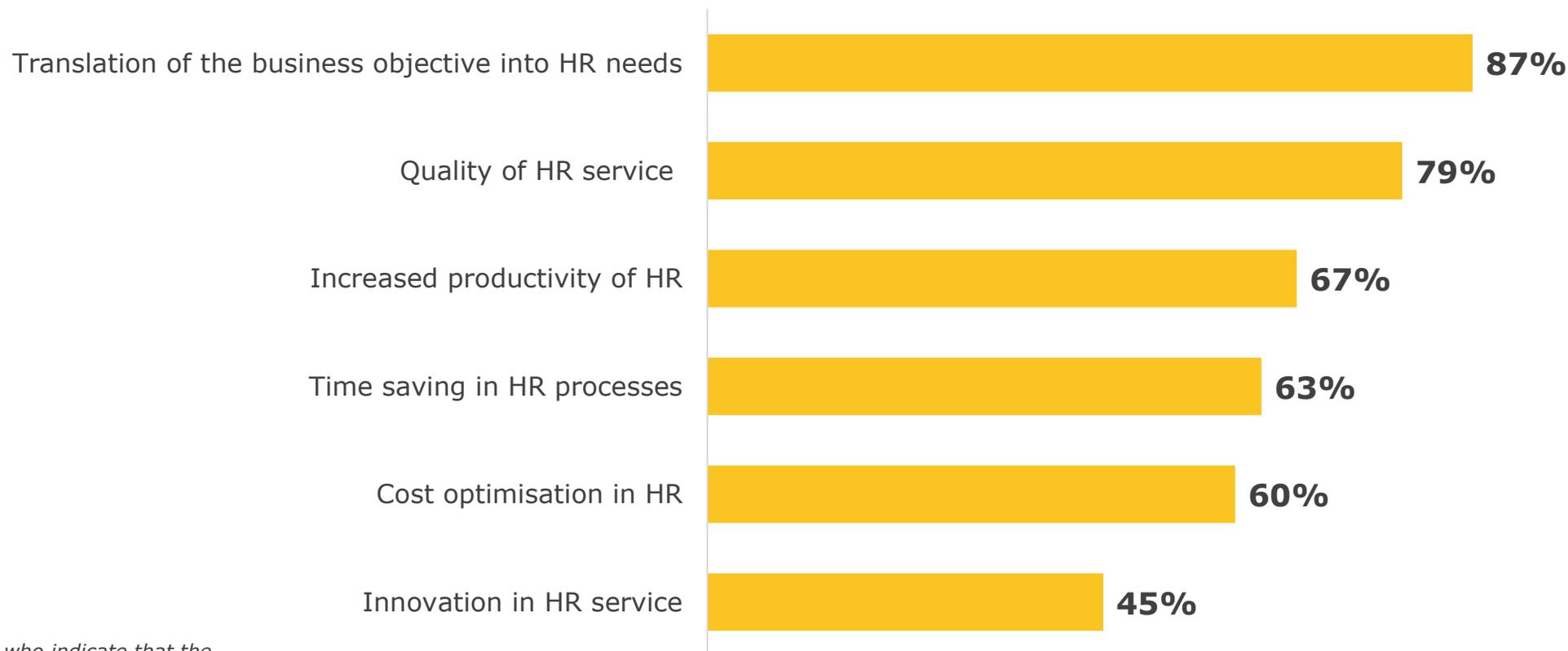
# TAKEAWAYS **EXPECTED** VERSUS **CURRENT** CONTRIBUTION AREAS

- Overall, HR already contributes to the organisational outcomes HR Directors expect the executive board to prioritise over the next five years.
  - Its strongest contributions are in **the organisational strategy, continuous organisational change,** and **the development of the company culture.**
  - Contributions are weakest in **innovation** and **sustainability/ESG performance.**
- The biggest gaps appear in the mid-priority areas:
  - According to HR Directors, the executive board considers **a reskilled and upskilled workforce** and **strong business results** as key outcomes for the coming five years. However, HR's current contribution in these areas is still perceived as relatively limited.



# IMPACT OF INTERNAL HR OBJECTIVES ON FUTURE-ORIENTED HR STRATEGIES

*"To what extent do the following internal HR objectives influence your HR department's future-oriented strategy?"*



*% of HR Directors who indicate that the objective has a (very) large influence*

# IMPACT OF EXTERNAL TRENDS ON FUTURE-ORIENTED HR STRATEGIES

*"To what extent do the following external trends influence your HR department's future-oriented strategy?"*

## BIGGEST IMPACT

- Digitalisation, automation, and artificial intelligence
- Changing legal obligations
- Changing skills requirements
- Changing expectations (e.g. employee, market, customer)

## MEDIUM IMPACT

- Talent shortages
- Economic volatility and inflation
- Changing workforce demographics
- Increasing business competition

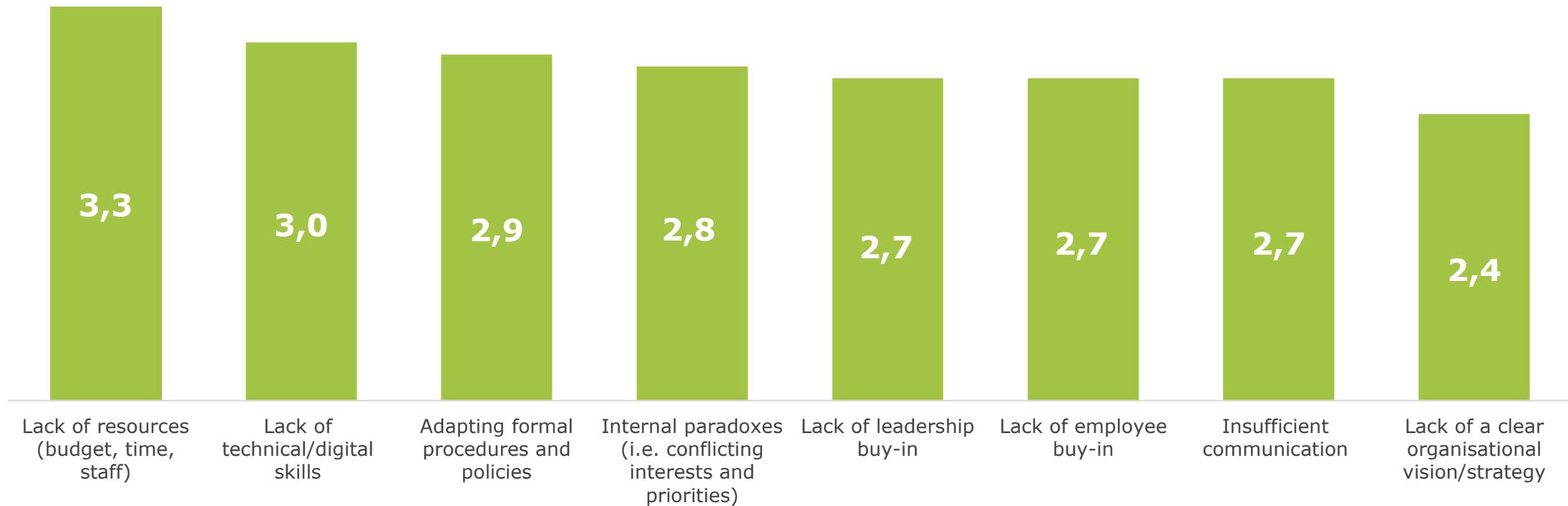
## SMALLEST IMPACT

- Increasing alternative work arrangements (e.g. gig work, hybrid work)
- Globalisation and cross-border collaboration
- Geopolitical tensions
- Climate and sustainability pressures

*Based on the average score indicated by HR Directors on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all, 5 = to a very large extent)*

# IMPACT OF INTERNAL CHALLENGES ON HR'S FUTURE READINESS

*"To what extent do the following internal challenges affect your HR department's ability to adapt to the future of work?"*



*Average score indicated by HR Directors on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all, 5 = to a very large extent)*

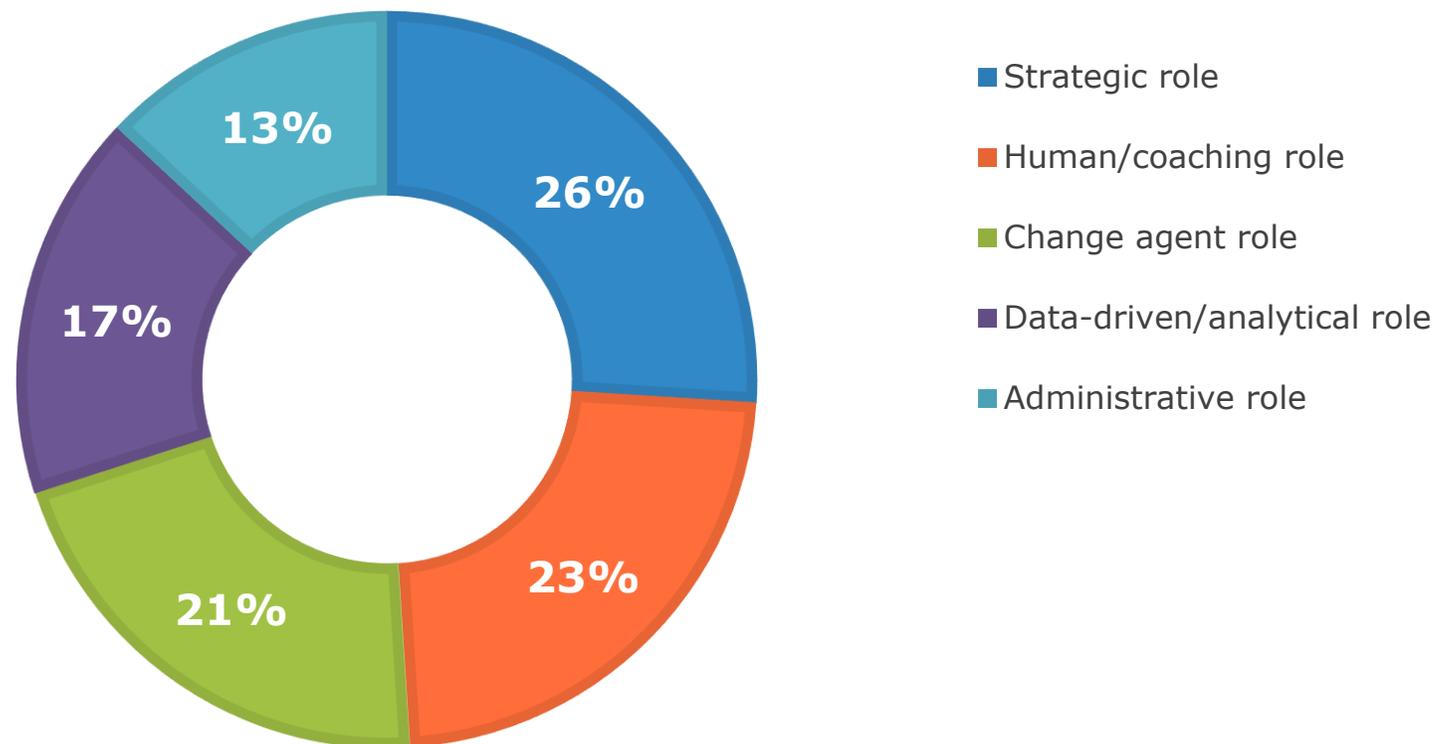
# A CLOSER LOOK: INTERNAL CHALLENGES IN RELATION TO OTHER MEASURED OUTCOMES

- In organisations where the HR Director indicates that **gaps in technical and digital skills** ( $r = .201^*$ ) and **the need to adapt formal procedures and policies** ( $r = .180^*$ ) hinder the HR department's ability to adapt to the future of work, HR is more likely to prioritise Learning & Development.
- In organisations where the HR Director indicates that **a lack of a clear organisational vision or strategy** hinders the HR department's ability to adapt to the future of work, the CHRO is less likely to be recognised as a strategic business partner by the executive board ( $r = -.189^*$ ).



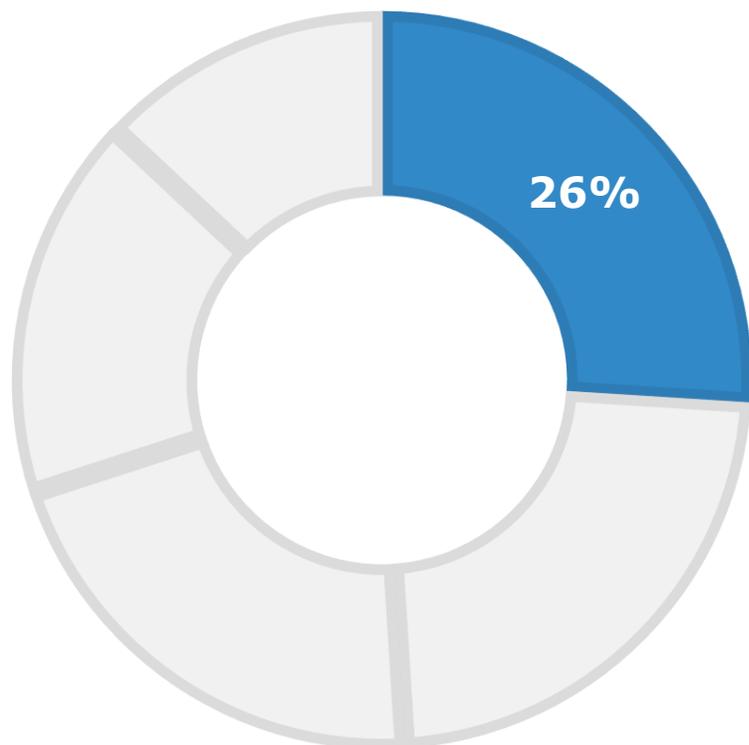
# FUTURE ALLOCATION OF HR RESPONSIBILITIES

*In the next five years, the HR department's focus should be allocated as follows:*



*Average percentage distributed per HR role  
(total = 100%)*

# A CLOSER LOOK: THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF HR



In organisations where the HR Director anticipates a more **strategic role** for HR in the next five years ...



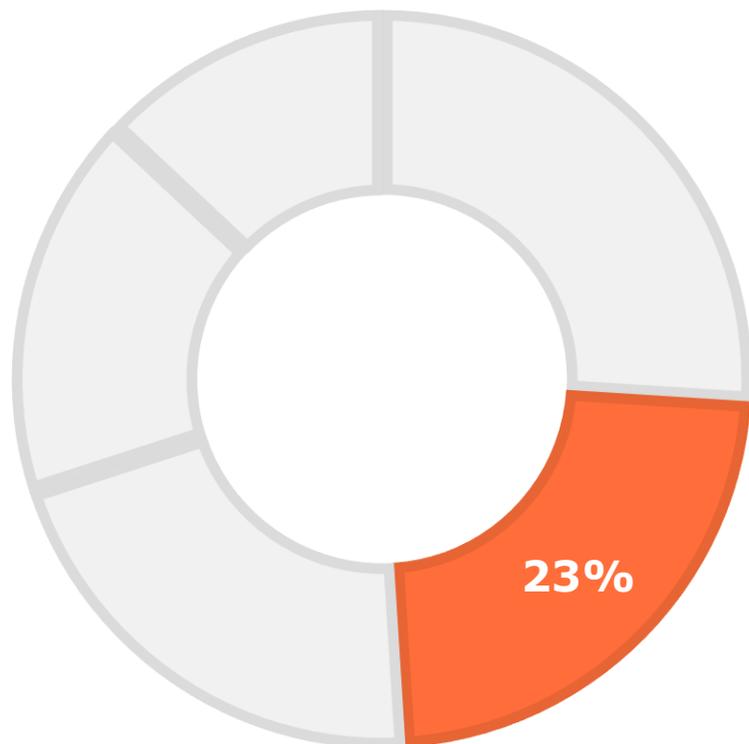
... **strategic thinking** is generally seen as a top skill for CHRO success ( $r = .261^*$ ).



... HR is less likely to agree with the following statement: "In the next five years, the CHRO will primarily collaborate with the CEO and executive board to build **collaborative relationships with key stakeholders**" ( $r = -.346^*$ ).

*Statistically significant positive and negative relationships for the strategic role of HR*

# A CLOSER LOOK: THE HUMAN/COACHING ROLE OF HR



In organisations where the HR Director anticipates a more **human/coaching role** for HR in the next five years ...

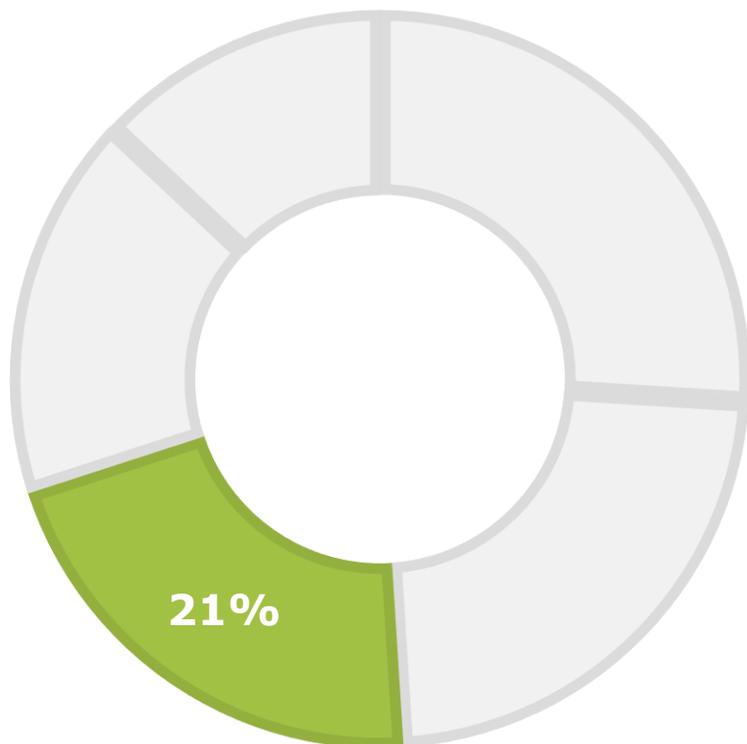


... **Compensation & Benefits** ( $r = -.189^*$ ) and **Strategic Workforce Management** ( $r = -.200^*$ ) are generally perceived as lower HR priorities.

... HR is less likely to already contribute to **evidence-based decision-making across the organisation** ( $r = -.178^*$ ).

Statistically significant negative relationships for the human/coaching role of HR

# A CLOSER LOOK: THE CHANGE AGENT ROLE OF HR



Statistically significant positive relationships for the change agent role of HR

In organisations where the HR Director anticipates a more **change agent role** for HR in the next five years ...

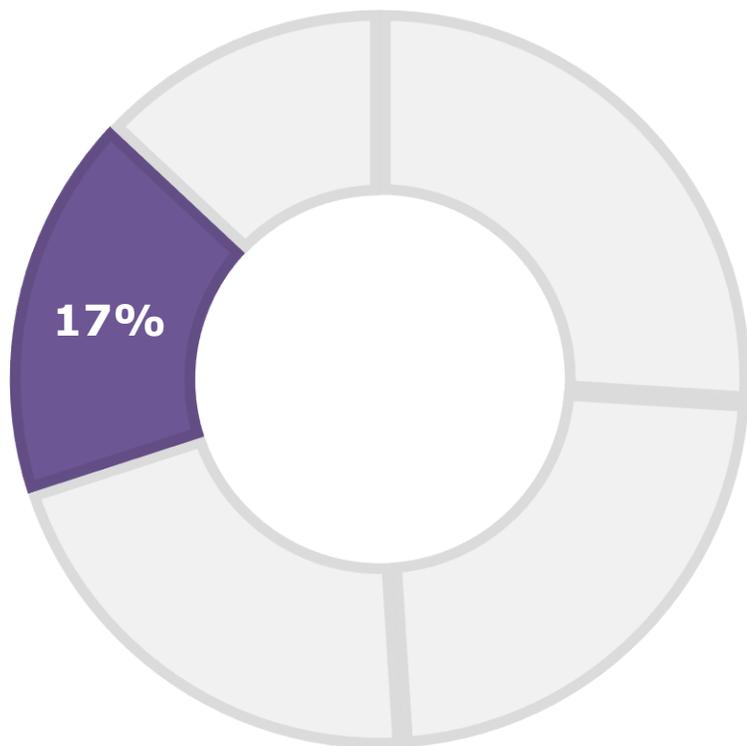


... **Engagement** tends to be identified as a key HR priority ( $r = .177^*$ ).

... **changing expectations** (e.g. employees, market, customers) tend to be viewed as an important external trend shaping the HR strategy ( $r = .201^*$ ).

... HR is more likely to agree with the following statement: "In the next five years, the CHRO will primarily collaborate with the CEO and executive board to lead **organisational change** and embed change initiatives in **the company culture** ( $r = .312^{**}$ ).

# A CLOSER LOOK: THE DATA-DRIVEN/ANALYTICAL ROLE OF HR



Statistically significant positive and negative relationships for the data-driven/analytical role of HR

In organisations where the HR Director anticipates a more **data-driven/analytical role** for HR in the next five years ...



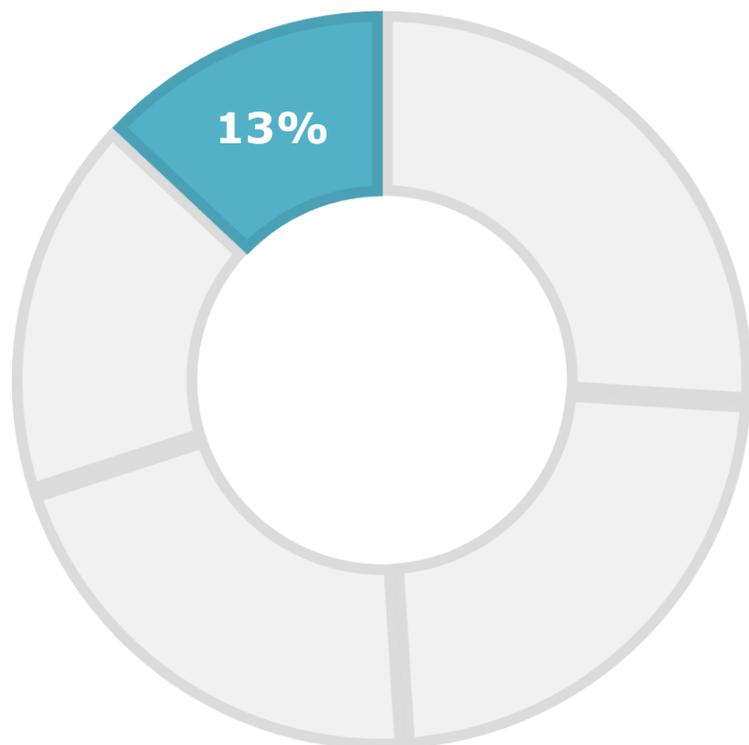
... **HR Analytics** ( $r = .301^{**}$ ) and **Compensation & Benefits** ( $r = .176^*$ ) are more likely to be identified as key HR priorities.

... HR is more likely to already contribute to **business results** ( $r = .259^*$ ) and **digital transformation across the organisation** ( $r = .201^*$ ).



... HR is less likely to agree with the following statement: "The future of HR is **unpredictable**; we have to take it as it comes" ( $r = -.179^*$ ).

# A CLOSER LOOK: THE ADMINISTRATIVE ROLE OF HR



In organisations where the HR Director anticipates a more **administrative role** for HR in the next five years ...



... HR generally reports higher current mastery in:

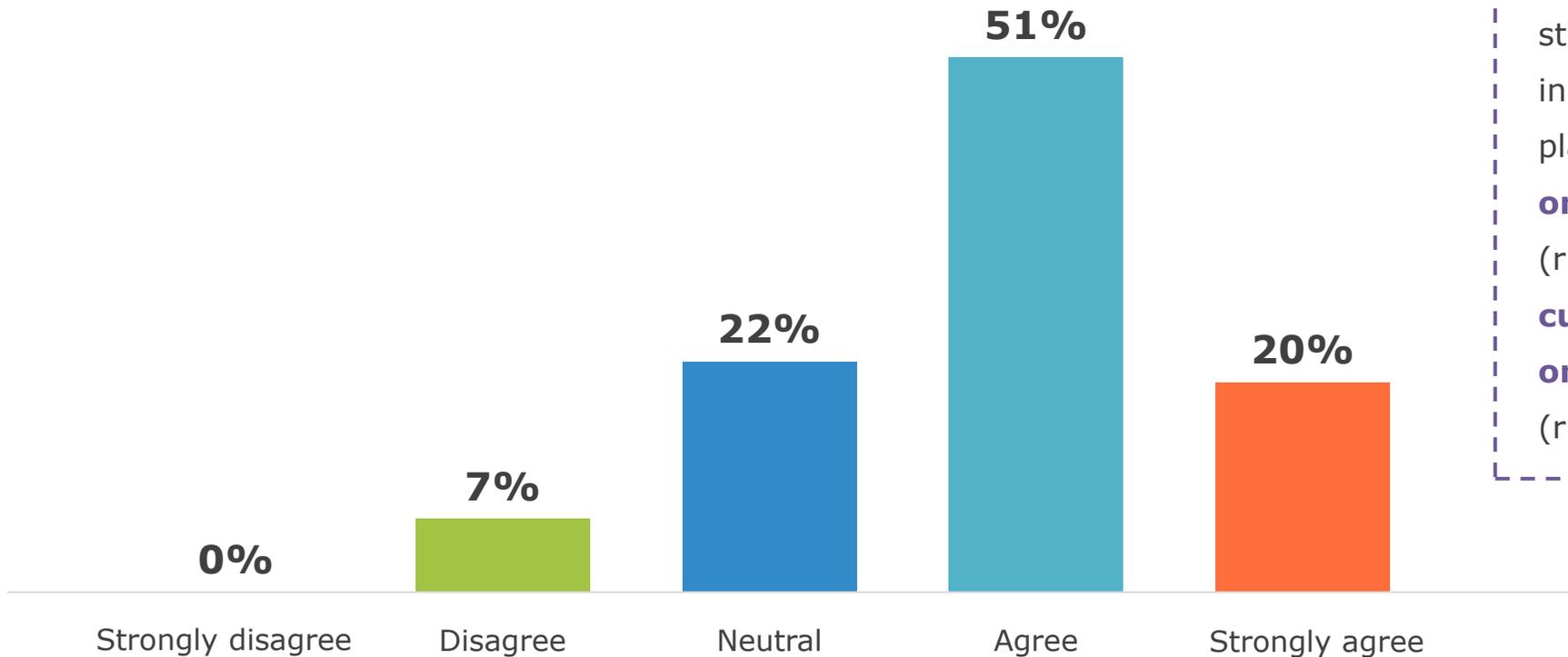
- **Selection & Recruitment** (r = .244\*\*)
- **HR Operational Excellence** (r = .177\*)

... HR is more likely to agree with the following statement:  
 “The future of HR is **unpredictable**; we have to take it as it comes” (r = .281\*).

Statistically significant positive relationships for the administrative role of HR

# HR AS A DRIVER OF CHANGE

*"Our HR department doesn't just respond to change; we make it happen"*

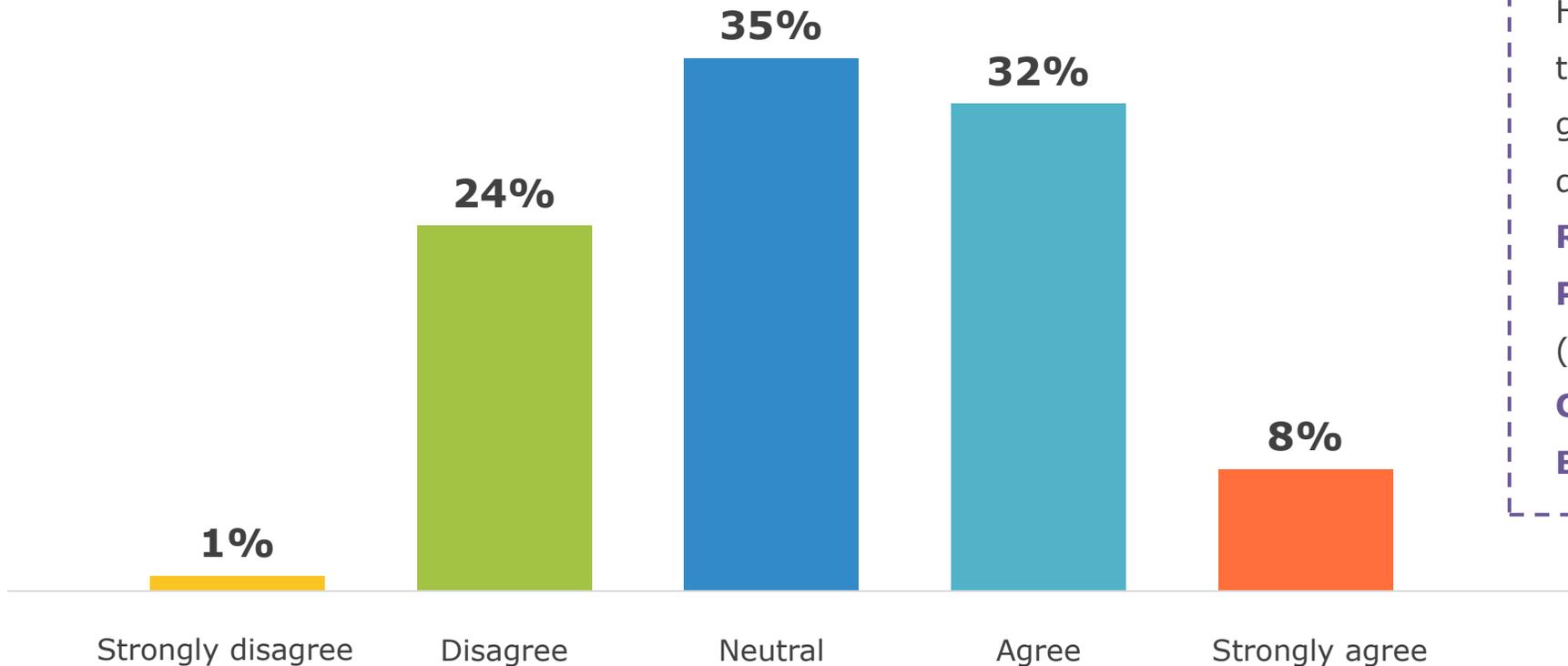


HR Directors who agree with this statement are more likely to work in companies where HR already plays a key role in shaping **the organisational strategy** ( $r = .238^{**}$ ), **the company culture** ( $r = .338^{**}$ ), and **organisational change** ( $r = .301^{**}$ ).



# PERCEIVED FUTURE READINESS OF HR

*"Our HR department is equipped with the skills needed to succeed in the future"*



HR Directors who agree with this statement tend to report greater mastery in classic HR domains such as **Selection & Recruitment** ( $r = .278^{**}$ ), **Performance Management** ( $r = .279^{**}$ ), and **Compensation & Benefits** ( $r = .236^{**}$ ).



# HR'S ROLE IN BUILDING FUTURE LEADERS

*"Our HR department builds the leaders of tomorrow"*

63%

HR Directors who agree with this statement are more likely to prioritise **Leadership Development** ( $r = .233^{**}$ ) and tend to report stronger mastery in this area ( $r = .311^{**}$ ).



# HR'S ROLE IN BUILDING FUTURE TALENT

*"Our HR department builds the workforce of tomorrow"*

68%

HR Directors who agree with this statement tend to report stronger mastery across key HR practices, including **Selection & Recruitment** ( $r = .220^*$ ), **Learning & Development** ( $r = .204^*$ ), and **Strategic Workforce Management** ( $r = .177^*$ ).

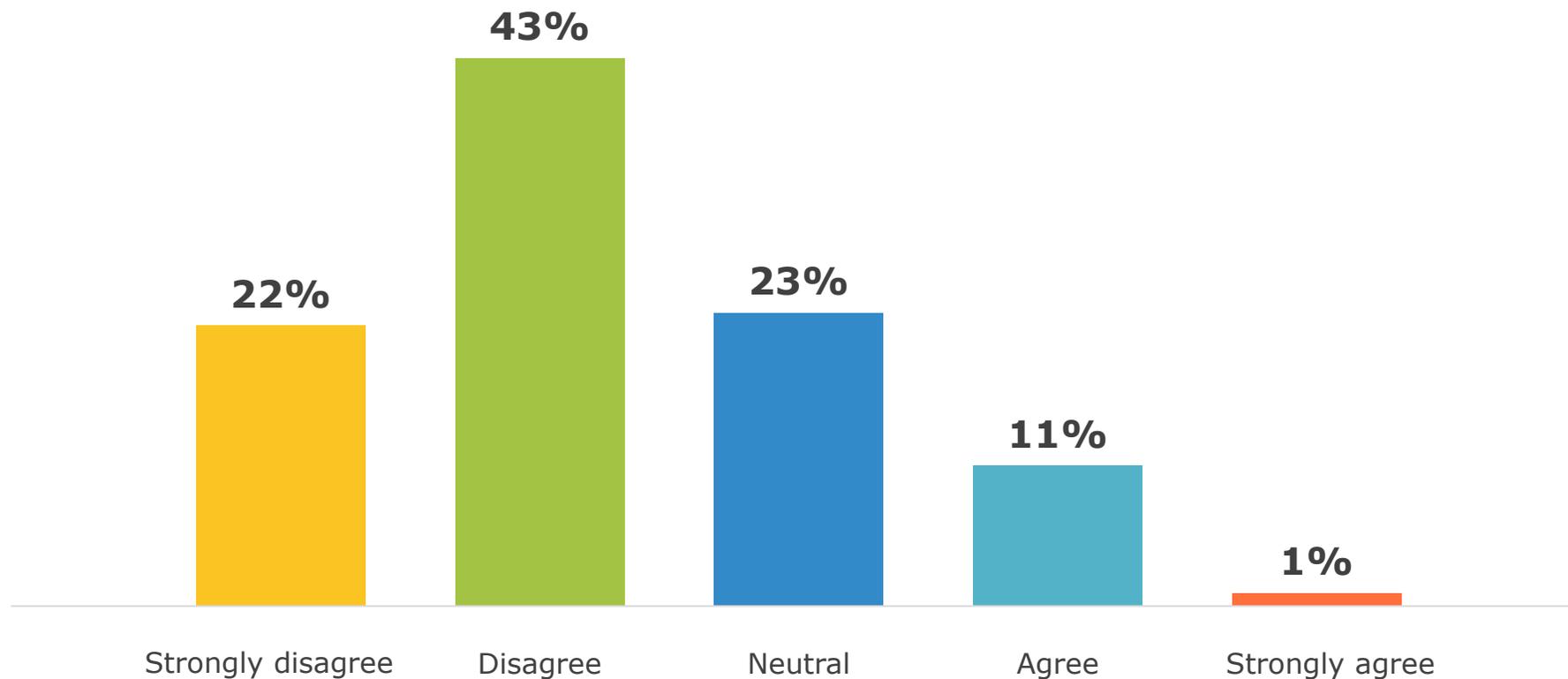




## **II. THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE CHRO**

# HR LEADERS CHOOSE ACTION OVER PASSIVITY, BUT ...

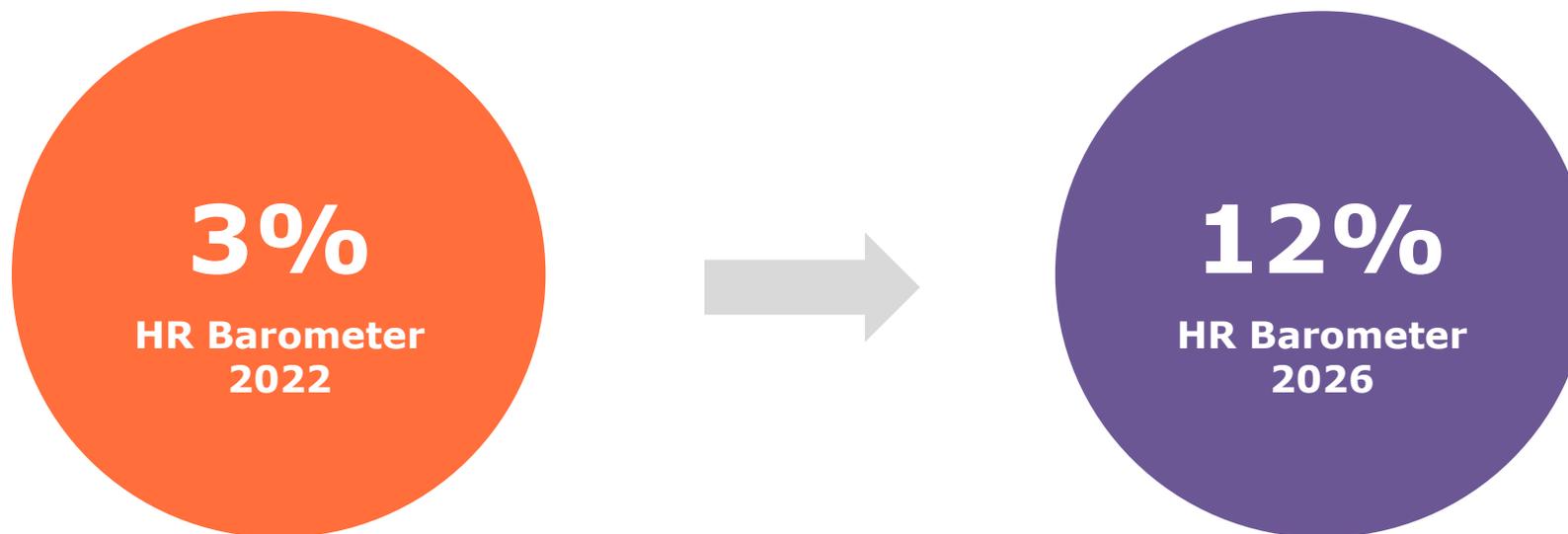
*"The future of HR is unpredictable; we have to take it as it comes"*



% of HR Directors

# ... PERCEIVED UNPREDICTABILITY OF HR'S FUTURE INCREASES

*"The future of HR is unpredictable; we have to take it as it comes"*



*% of HR Directors who (strongly) agree with the statement*

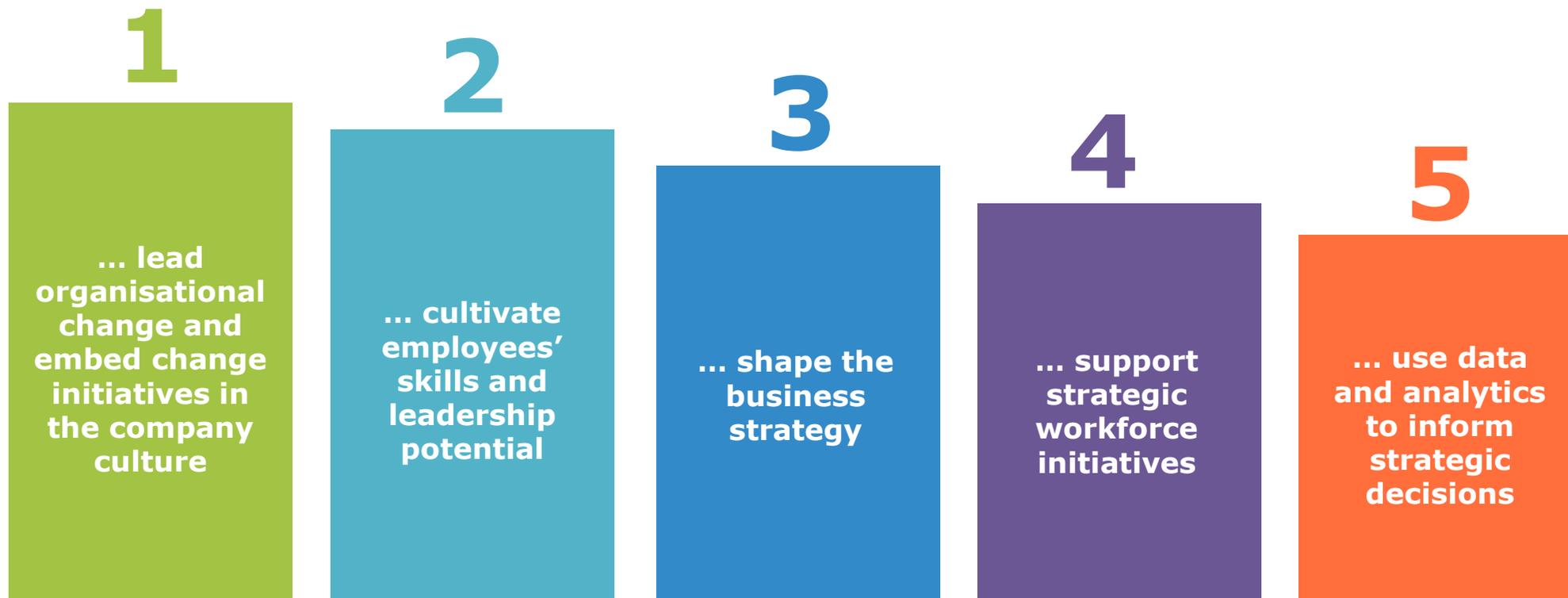
# PERCEIVED UNPREDICTABILITY SHAPES HR'S FUTURE ROLE

- HR Directors who perceive the future of HR as unpredictable are more likely to assign lower importance to HR's role as **a strategic business partner**, both currently ( $r = -.183^*$ ) and in the future ( $r = -.295^{**}$ ).
- HR Directors who perceive the future of HR as unpredictable tend to place greater focus on **the administrative role** of HR ( $r = .281^{**}$ ).
- HR Directors who perceive the future of HR as unpredictable tend to place less emphasis on **the data-driven/analytical role** of HR ( $r = -.179^*$ ).

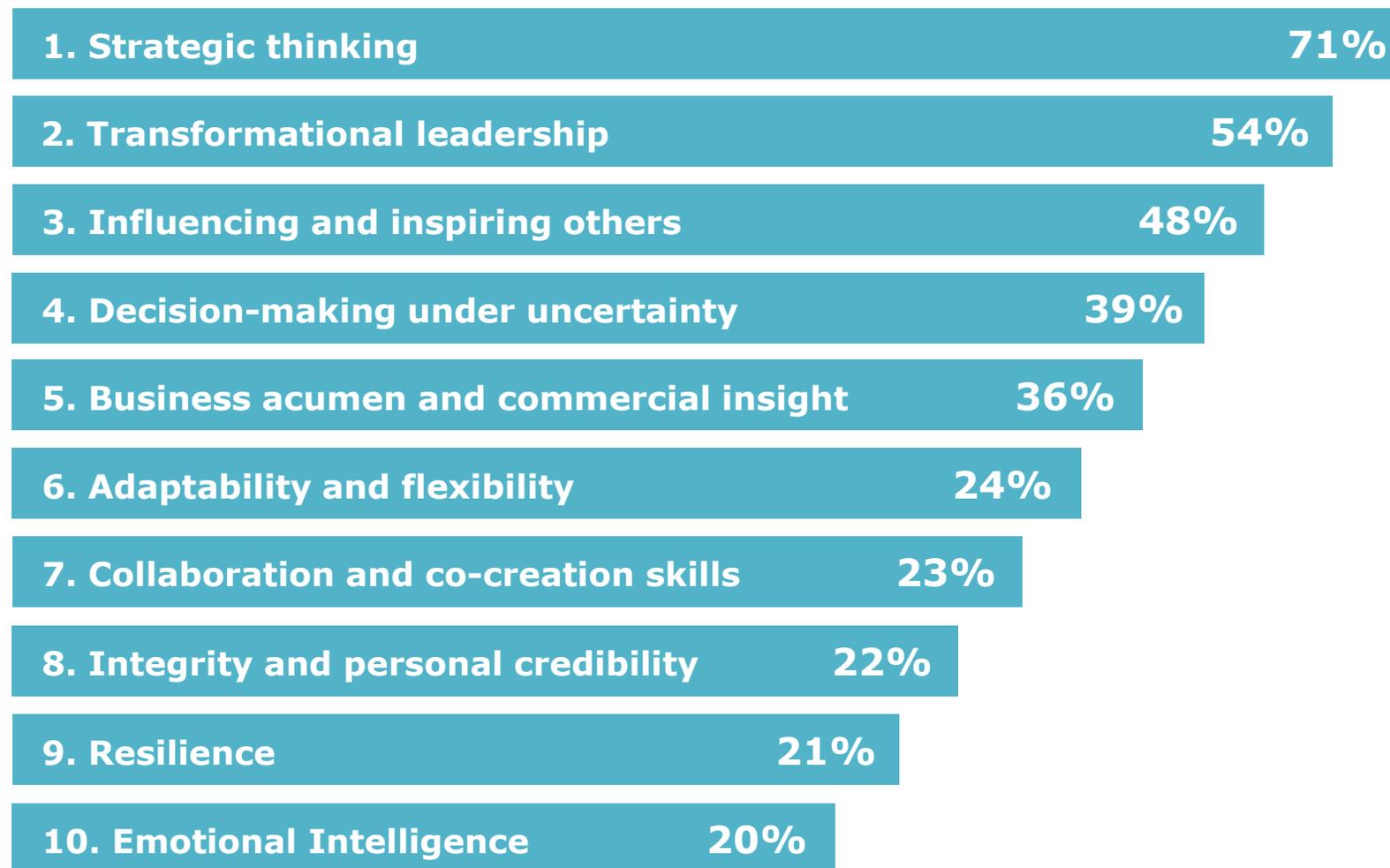


# TOP 5 FUTURE FOCUS AREAS FOR CHROs

*In the next five years, the CHRO will primarily collaborate with the CEO and the executive board to ...*



# TOP 10 CHRO SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE



*% of HR Directors who ranked the skill in their top 5 skills for future CHRO success*

# THE CHRO AT THE EXECUTIVE TABLE

*"In my organisation, the CHRO is a formal member of the executive board/top leadership team"*

89%

*"In my organisation, the CHRO is recognised as a strategic business partner by the executive board/top leadership team"*

91%

In **1/10 companies**, the CHRO is not a formal member of the executive board/top leadership team.



# THE CHRO AT THE EXECUTIVE TABLE

- In organisations where the CHRO is a formal member of the executive board, **Engagement** ( $r = .240^{**}$ ) and **Industrial Relationships** ( $r = .286^{**}$ ) are more likely to be considered key HR priorities.



- In organisations where the CHRO is a formal member of the executive board, generally less focus is allocated to **the human/coaching role** of HR ( $r = -.198^*$ ).
- In organisations where the CHRO is a formal member of the executive board, **translating business objectives into HR needs** is more likely to play a major role in shaping a future-oriented HR strategy ( $r = .284^{**}$ ).



# THE CHRO AS A STRATEGIC PARTNER

*"Over the next five years, the CHRO is expected to take on a more strategic role within the organisation"*

67%

- HR Directors who agree with this statement are more likely to work in organisations where the CHRO is already **a formal member of the executive board/top leadership team** ( $r = .321^{**}$ ).
- HR Directors who agree with this statement are more likely to work in organisations where the CHRO is already recognised as **a strategic business partner** by the executive board/top leadership team ( $r = .257^{**}$ ).



# THE CHRO AS A STRATEGIC PARTNER

- In organisations where the CHRO is expected to take on a more strategic role over the next five years, strategic HR domains such as **Preparing the Organisation for Growth** ( $r = .184^*$ ), **Digital Transformation** ( $r = .251^{**}$ ), and **Strategic Workforce Management** ( $r = .287^{**}$ ) are more likely to be prioritised.
- In organisations where the CHRO is a formal member of the executive board, HR is more likely to already contribute to the organisational strategy as **a strategic business partner** ( $r = .261^{**}$ ).
- In organisations where the CHRO is expected to take on a more strategic role over the next five years, **influencing and inspiring others** is more likely to be identified as a key skill for CHRO success ( $r = .291^*$ ), whereas skills such as **business acumen and commercial insight** are generally seen as less critical ( $r = -.287^*$ ).



# THE CHRO AS DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

*"The CHRO should more frequently act as devil's advocate in key organisational decisions"*

71%

- HR Directors who report that the executive board considers HR's contribution to **evidence-based decision-making** a key priority for the next five years are more likely to agree with this statement ( $r = .560^*$ ).
- HR Directors who report that **a lack of a clear organisational vision or strategy** hinders the HR department's ability to adapt to the future of work are more likely to agree with this statement ( $r = .253^*$ ).



# FUTURE SUCCESS REQUIREMENTS FOR CHROs

*"To succeed in the future, CHROs will need to reinvent their skills and capabilities"*



HR Directors who agree with this statement are more likely to prioritise **Retention** ( $r = .180^*$ ), **HR Operational Excellence** ( $r = .272^{**}$ ), and **Strategic Workforce Management** ( $r = .178^*$ ).



A grayscale photograph of a hand pointing to a diagram on a table. The diagram consists of several circles and lines, with a sticky note labeled 'DESIGN' placed on it. Other sticky notes with the words 'MAP', 'CHALLENGE', and 'ACTION' are visible. The background shows other people's hands and arms, suggesting a collaborative meeting.

## 4. FINAL TAKEAWAYS

# TAKEAWAYS: HR PRIORITY & HR MASTERY

- 1 **HR capacity shows its first big decline in a decade (!)** Organisations now employ one HR professional per 73 employees (median), suggesting increasing pressure on HR departments to deliver strategic value with more limited resources.
- 2 Reported **HR priorities** show the largest shift since the start of the HR Barometer, reflecting **a stronger preparation for economic downturn**, while **HR is still focussing on key HR activities, but in a more targeted way**:
  - **Preparing the Organisation for Stagnation/Downsizing** showed the largest increase in reported HR priority (+28). However, it still ranks among the lowest priority areas, and the business world is divided: whilst the issue is barely a concern for 40% of organisations (scoring below 20), almost a quarter (24%) give an alarm score of over 80.
  - Traditional HR priorities such as **Selection & Recruitment** and **Learning & Development** no longer appear in the top 3 priorities but remain in the strength area. Investments in (new) employees are therefore still continuing at a slower, more realistic pace.
  - **Leadership Development** and **Talent Management** continue to be top priorities (N°1 & N°2), while **Strategic Workforce Management** became the N°3 priority, showing the high importance attached to a strong leadership and long-term people strategy.
- 3 Reported **HR mastery & gaps**:
  - HR Directors report **increased confidence across all HR domains**, with **Hybrid Working** as the only exception (-5), suggesting ongoing professionalisation of HR departments.
  - Key priority domains such as **Digital Transformation** and emerging domains like **HR Analytics** and **Strategic Workforce Management** are not yet areas where HR departments feel highly competent (area for improvement quadrant).
  - **AI in HR** increased in priority score but remains experimental for many HR departments (no priority quadrant).

# TAKEAWAYS: THE FUTURE OF HR

- 1 Future focus** of HR departments:

  - According to HR Directors, HR is shifting towards a more **strategic** (26%), followed by a **human/coaching** (23%), and **change agent** (21%) role.
  - HR's current efforts in developing **the company culture**, driving **organisational change**, and supporting **the organisational strategy** closely align with the executive board's expectations for HR to act as a strategic business partner and to lead continuous organisational change over the next five years.
  
- 2** Readiness gaps in **digital transformation** and **workforce up- and reskilling**:

  - **Digitalisation, automation, AI**, and **evolving legal and skill requirements** are the main external drivers forcing HR to adapt.
  - **Reskilling and upskilling the workforce** is ranked as the third most expected action by executive boards.
  - Despite its importance, HR's current contribution to **digital transformation** remains low, and the re/upskilling efforts are only average.
  - Within HR departments, **limited digital skills** and **scarce resources** are key obstacles to becoming future-ready.
  
- 3** The CHRO role continues to evolve toward **strategic leadership**:

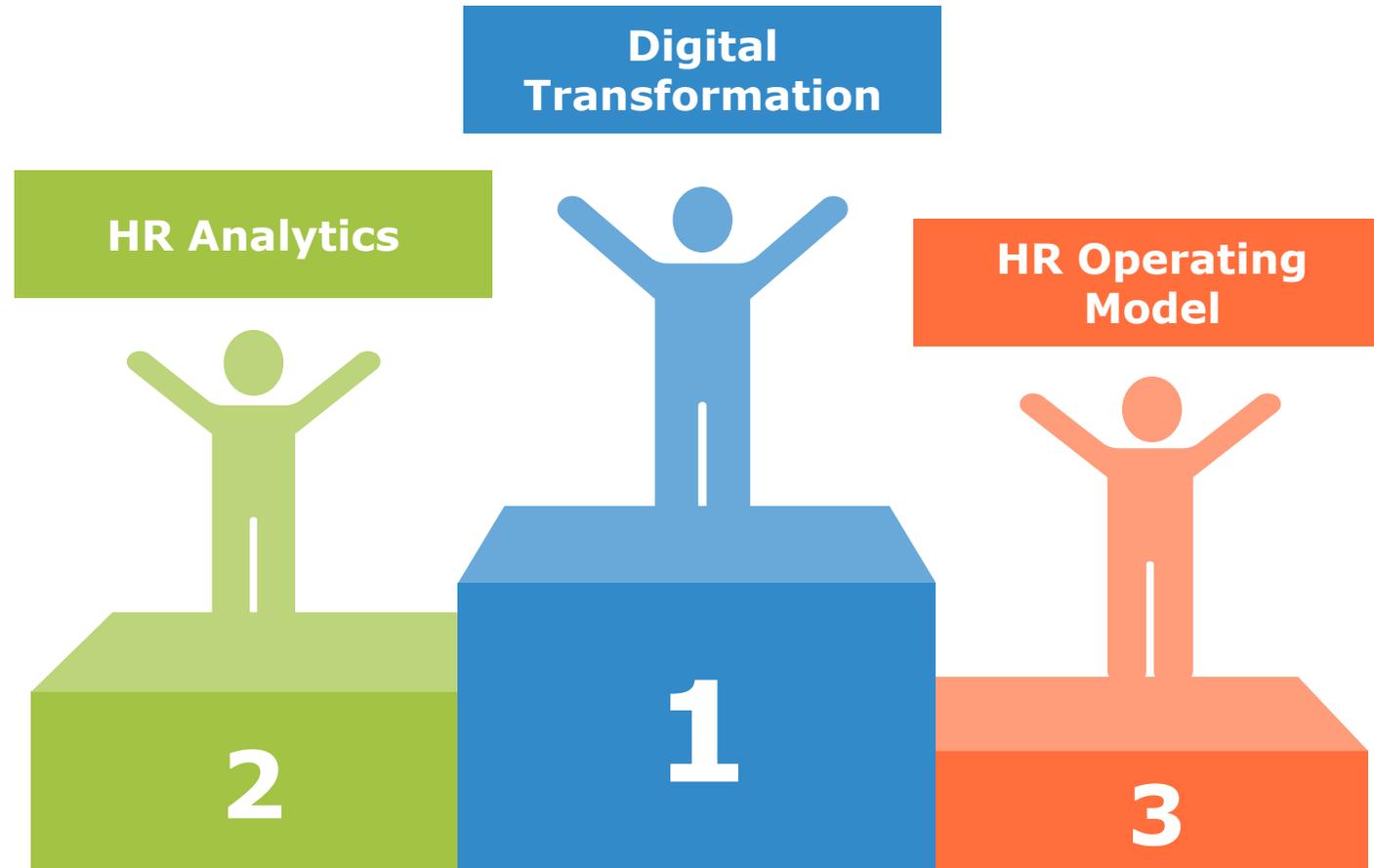
  - Most organisations recognise the CHRO as a **strategic business partner**, who is expected to collaborate with the CEO and the executive board to lead **organisational change** and embed change initiatives in **the company culture**.
  - Skills such as **strategic thinking, influencing and inspiring others**, and **transformational leadership** are increasingly seen as critical competencies for future CHRO success.
  - More HR Directors see the future of HR as unpredictable (increase from 3% in 2022 to 12% now). Those who prefer a **proactive approach** place greater emphasis on HR as a strategic business partner and the data-driven/analytical role of HR.



**5.  
TOPIC NEXT  
HR BAROMETER**

# HR BAROMETER SPOTLIGHT THEME FOR 2027

## TOP 3



*\*The topic for next year is subject to re-evaluation within the next six months*



**6.  
MORE  
INFORMATION**



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