



## Framing the challenge: Think like a researcher

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**David Mallon:**

Welcome back to Capital H, the podcast where we explore the latest trends and developments to make work better for humans and humans better at work.

I'm your host, David Mallon, chief analyst and lead of Deloitte's Insights2Action team.

Today kicks off part 2 of our four-part series on Deloitte's 2023 Global Human Capital Trends report. Three trends in this year's report exemplify the need for organizations and workers to think like a researcher.

Thinking like a researcher means seeing experiments as data. Differentiation and winning will come not from always believing you must have the right answer at the start,

but by being able to challenge orthodoxies, operate with humility and empathy, and learn from new information so you can refine as quickly as possible.

To showcase how organizations can successfully think like a researcher, you'll hear from a few of my Deloitte colleagues who are subject matter experts on the topic.

With that, let's jump into the conversation.

Let's dive in.

### ROUNDTABLE

**David:**

Welcome back, time for the roundtable. I'm privileged to be joined by two of my friends,

colleagues, and fellow Deloitte Human Capital Trends authors. First, Karen Weisz, she's a managing director in our workforce transformation practice with specific focus on workforce ecosystems and on the technology, media, and telecommunications industries. It's great to have you, Karen.

**Karen Weisz:**

Thank you, David. Nice to be here.

**David:**

And Shannon Poynton. She's a senior manager in our organization transformation practice, specializing in helping life sciences and health care organizations solve their critical work and workforce challenges. Welcome, Shannon.

**Shannon Poynton:**

Hi, David. Hi, Karen. Good to be with you.

**David:**

In our 2023 Global Human Capital Trends report, we offer three new fundamentals, three broad calls to action, just sort of good places to start as organizations look to craft new boundaries in this increasingly boundaryless world of work.

The first of these new fundamentals is Framing the challenge: Think like a researcher. In our report, we ask our readers to activate their curiosity, to see the world through a researcher's eyes, to test decisions methodically in service of impact and insight.

Our survey data found that almost two-thirds, 59%, of respondents are going to look to reimagine what they do and how they do it, the work itself, in the next two to four years. That's twice the number of organizations as pre-pandemic. Just perhaps not all that surprising.

In that context, three of this year's trends speak to where organizations all around the world are, in fact, actively testing new ideas, experimenting, looking to solve what are very thorny challenges but iteratively. Shannon and Karen are here to talk to these three trends, and we'll take each in turn.

First, one of the thorniest problems with regards to work and workforce today is simply the fact that most organizations are actually not very good at accurately describing what value and how value is created in the work and what value is needed from workers or that they could contribute.

Capturing this sort of supply and demand in language that is simple enough to be commonly used and granular enough to be actionable, I would suggest this is actually part of the root cause behind why so many organizations continue to struggle with their performance, management, or appraisal processes. And it has everything to do with why we are all talking about skills today.

Karen, starting with you, our first trend, "navigating the end of jobs." It's a very interesting title.

What do we mean by end of jobs? Are jobs really going away?

**Karen:**

Yeah, David, this is a great one because in the Human Capital Trends report, we asserted, somewhat controversially, that organizations are in the midst of navigating the end of jobs. And I think we'd all agree that we're not in a place where jobs have truly gone away, nor will they probably ever fully disappear.

But what we have seen happen and what we're definitely witnessing is a fundamental shift in the boundaries that delineated a job from a job and tasks and categorizing workers into narrow roles and responsibilities.

And instead, organizations really stepping back to look at what are the skills associated with performing the work that adds value to an organization. And many of those skills are much more transferable than I think we may have recognized always in the past. And we're needing to put in place the mechanisms to allow for that skill transfer in a much more fluid way.

So, some of the things I think we've seen driving that shift: certainly performance pressure as organizations need to get more and more productive and drive more and more performance from the workforce, doing that in a more agile way. We know certainly, and this is very much true in the tech industry, and I know it's true in many others as well, really volatile talent shortages.

So, we had, in the periods over the last couple of years, significant shortage of talent and the ability to look at workers through a more skills-based lens, allowed for more fluidity and more ability to bring workers into the organization and move them to areas of greater value.

So, all of those factors contribute to the shift that we're seeing. And yet at the same time, I think when we talked and surveyed clients and organizations, 93% of the respondents said that moving away from the focus on jobs is important, but only 20% of them feel like they're actually ready to tackle it within their organization. So, this is one of

the larger readiness gaps we saw of all of the trends.

So, when we think about this, some new fundamentals are key. Really, organizations who can step back and define work based on skills required, again, viewing workers based on their skills, not their job titles—this is going to make all the difference.

And Shannon, I know you had a couple of stories that you might be able to share based on clients you've worked with and where we've seen success in the industries.

**Shannon:**

Yeah, absolutely, Karen, and I loved that introduction and overview of this shift from jobs to skills. And I think one of the things that we've talked a lot about across this episode and others is this concept of boundarylessness, and executives are telling us that they're overwhelmed by the amount of change that they're experiencing.

And part of what's making change so overwhelming is not being able to respond to change using the boundaries and the constructs that we've had in the past. And I think this idea of the job or the construct of the job is a great example of this. There's only 19% of executives now believing that work is best structured through jobs.

So, we're seeing really interesting experiments in the market of how organizations are shifting to become what we would call more skills-based organizations. And those that are able to make that shift or seem really positive business results. They're about 52% more likely to be innovative than their peers. They're about 57% more likely to be more agile than their peers. So, really positive business results.

One great example of this is a financial services organization that developed a virtual career assistant, and that career assistant actually uses AI [artificial intelligence] to mine employees' interests and skills and determine the most suitable jobs for them.

It also suggests where training could help them pursue new opportunities.

So, I think [that's] a really good example of how organizations are trying to surface this idea of skills to create greater agility in the workforce and to support workforce development.

**David:**

I'm going to switch to our second trend now, but I think there's a natural bridge here. In what you've both talked about, in terms of the end of jobs and skills, is this notion of sort of what skills are required of the human doing the work and so much in today's world that's also then what skills are going to be done by our technology friends, our machine friends.

Our second fundamental picks up on a theme that I think has been really consistent in our global Human Capital Trends reports over the years, and that is this evolving relationship between people and machine.

The second trend is "powering human impact with technology." This relationship between intelligent technology and workers continues to evolve. If you think back over a history of business, at least modern-day business since the Industrial Revolution, technology's been really mostly about trying to find substitutes for workers, trying to automate them out of tasks that were dull and dirty and dangerous, and ultimately to make things more efficient and reduce costs.

Then the last, let's say few years, few decades, we've woken up to the notion that we can actually use technology to augment workers where technology sits alongside the human as a tool, and it helps to expand and accelerate what they can do.

Most recently though, we've been talking about this notion of technology as a collaborator, as a way to enhance the capabilities of humans themselves doing the work. We referenced this in recent trends, in previous reports, under the topics of super jobs and super teams.

And we see this particular thread accelerating. We've seen now technologies emerging that aren't just substitute and they're not just augmentation; they actually are helping us. They're helping humans to

be better humans and teams to become better teams.

Shannon, I'll start with you. What's different today? How can we actually use technology to power human impact?

**Shannon:**

David, it's a great question and one that I love because we've, over the years, talked about the different ways that really technology can make work better for humans. When we talked about the concept of super jobs, we were talking about how technology can pull certain elements out of the job and leave the work that's innately human left. So, allowing humans to operate at the top of their capability and bring their most human skills to the work.

Then we talked about super teams, and we talked about how technology could augment teams, help teams be more creative, help teams problem solve, explore empathy—kind of cuing the team to drive more synergies, cuing the team to be able to achieve more exponential outcomes.

This year, what I think is really exciting is the idea that technology can come in and not actually be seen as a separate force from humans anymore, but actually enhance both human and team performance.

I think one of my favorite examples of this is a technology when presenters are presenting to big audiences, there are technologies that kind of listen in to them as they're presenting. And the technology can give them live cues.

Are they speaking too quickly? Are they not speaking quickly enough? Is the language that they're using in their presentation inclusive or the best language to be using to connect with the audience? Over time, the technology really becomes linked to the human in a way that will actually help humans achieve better outcomes at work.

**Karen:**

Yeah, actually Shannon, I love that story, and it makes me think of a couple others too. You mentioned the use of the technology in essentially coaching speakers. I think we've seen other organizations who are using this

across all elements of performance and frankly worker engagement and retention.

So, they'll use the technology to mine data that exists within the organization around engagement scores, what makes people feel happy, and then linking their performance to the individual's goals and sending them nudges that'll show up in their email or Slack or Teams so that their performance is being coached on an ongoing basis.

And one other story I have to share because I love this one, too, and I think this really speaks to accessibility. And David, to your point about how the technology can just make us better humans. There's a robot café in Tokyo that has robot servers, and these are operated remotely by people who are unable to leave their homes due to disability or the need to support childcare or other reasons.

Those remote-controlled robot avatars allow these remote workers to access the workplace and give them opportunities to interact with others and expand the potential pool of people who can work in the café. So, it's a win-win all around.

**David:**

It's a really great story, and a natural, again, bridge to our third and final trend for today. Whether the workplace is in a conference room, on a stage, in a robot café, this notion of where work happens continues to be top of mind for organizations and companies all around the world.

It continues to be a very unsettled question, and you can pretty much find new stories, new data, new points of view, people taking sides pretty much almost daily. What exactly is the workplace? Our last trend in this section is "activating the future of workplace."

Karen, I'm going to stick with you. What's the future of the workplace? How do we activate it?

**Karen:**

Yeah, I think we'd all love a crystal ball with that one. And I think so much of the conversation around workplace in recent years has been focused on this notion

of hybrid and are you going back into a traditional office space or are you not?

And while that's still certainly an active conversation for many of the organizations that we work with, we also see that there's just frankly a blurring of that boundary. This is another example of where the boundaries are continuing to disintegrate.

The example I gave a moment ago about the robot café, that is where technology is allowing us to blur that line. And it isn't about going into a traditional workplace or staying at home; it's actually how does the workplace need to evolve to actually be an input to the work itself. How can it actually make it possible to influence the nature of the work and expand the number of people who can do the work and the types of skills and locations they live in.

I think this is another one where the readiness gap and the importance was pretty big. We only had 15% of our respondents say that the way work is designed is one of the most important attributes in creating the future workplace.

And yet we know the way the work is designed is going to be a tremendous influence on what the future workplace needs to look like.

Workers have a lot more agency than they did before the pandemic, and they're exercising it, and they're making their views and their desires known. That paired with technology advancements really opens a whole new world for what we have traditionally thought of, of workplace and how that's going to be experienced going forward.

**Shannon:**

Karen, that's so well said. And I love your point, that this is another place where we're really seeing boundaries blurring. I think a great example of this is BMW, who's actually bringing the metaverse to a traditionally physical work environment: the factory.

And what BMW is doing is they're using NVIDIA's Omniverse, a 3D collaborative metaverse platform, to create a perfect simulation of a future factory. In other

words, a digital twin. And that future factory was designed entirely in the digital realm and simulated from the beginning to end to train and remotely connect workers in a virtual 3D environment.

And in this environment, BMW's global teams can collaborate in real time, design and reconfigure factories, revolutionize their planning process—all while eliminating the need for travel. So, workers are actually traveling virtually, in this case, into an assembly simulation with motion capture suits that can record task movements, and actually able to make design changes to the line in real time to optimize operations as well as worker safety. So, I think that's a really great example.

Another example, that I'd love to share, Karen, around your second point that this trend in workplace is actually expanding the number of people that can do the work. I think a great example of this is in virtual nursing. We're seeing a lot of health care organizations right now experiment with virtual nursing pilots. Something that's so important because the majority of health care organizations, especially in the US, continue to experience shortages in nursing and are having trouble attracting and retaining nursing staff after the pandemic.

And one example of this, AdventHealth, was able to actually add virtual nurses to its care teams, to both enhance the workforce experience for nurses who are physically in person and enabling better teamwork with these virtual nurse team members who are on the screen.

So, not only are the virtual nurses allowed or able to offload the work from the in-person nurse, but virtually they're all able to collaborate to ensure good outcomes and to really ensure most importantly a positive patient experience.

**David:**

So, we're about out of time. Let's close out our conversation today with some parting thoughts on this notion of thinking like a researcher.

As some of these fundamental boundaries and assumptions fall away, as organizations and workers can't depend on kind of

tried-and-true notions of where work happens and what work is and how it's done, why is it so important that organizations and their leaders think like researchers? I'll start with you, Shannon.

**Shannon:**

That's a great question, David. And the answer I would give, first and foremost, is just that this is really hard. We've talked a lot in this episode about how executives are overwhelmed by the amount of change they're experiencing, how they're witnessing the dissolution of boundaries, and that is requiring them to bring very different strategies, to use very different assumptions than they've ever had to for work.

And I think part of the shift here is that, in the past as organizations and as leaders, we were taught that we're going to win in the market by having the right answer and by being first to market with that right answer.

And now we're seeing a greater emphasis or a greater importance of intellectual humility. These are really thorny problems that you're not going to suddenly come up with the right answer from the start. And instead, you need to test, you need to try, and most importantly, you need to be willing to learn.

So, organizations that are able to adopt this experimentation mindset, organizations that are willing to give their leaders, give their teams permission to fail fast, fail forward, learn and innovate—those are now the ones that are actually going to be able to create differentiation in the market. Not those that try to take their time to plan out and get to the right answer before moving. Karen, what would you add?

**Karen:**

Yeah, I was about to say, Shannon, I think that was so well said. And what it also makes me think about, though, and I know we didn't address it directly here, but in our Human Capital Trends report, we also touch on two other fundamentals.

And both of those I think are so connected to the point you made around humility and being willing to step back and learn again what we don't know to solve difficult problems.

And inherent in those are the notion that more and more organizations need to co-create with their workers—what the future’s going to look like, what their workforce is going to look like—and make sure that in doing so, they’re really prioritizing very human outcomes.

And again, that’s different from old ways of operating around being first to market. Advances in technology, all the things we’re seeing around AI, continue to point us towards there will be an ongoing need in prioritization for people who can lead with humility and those who can show up in a human interactive, collaborative way. That, in and of itself, is a big shift for leaders.

And their success going forward really represents a shift from managing jobs and people and activities to making sure they’re able to orchestrate outcomes across a whole ecosystem of workers that could include full-time workers, contingent workers, gig, machines, and bots. And how do they ensure that all of that workforce can come together in service of driving value for the organization.

**David:**

That sounds like a great place to end for today and a nice lead-in to our other two episodes to come. I want to thank my two guests today. Thank you, Karen.

**Karen:**

Absolutely. Great to be here. Thanks, David.

**David:**

And thank you, Shannon.

**Shannon:**

Of course, thank you.

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