



AI and the rise of

the Supergeneralist

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Future of work

To our partners in the workforce community,

For decades, the career “gold standard” was simple: find a niche, hone it, and stay there. But as AI reshapes the foundations of how we work, that strategy is shifting.

At Cielo, our research shows that building a sustainable organization requires a new kind of talent: the **Supergeneralist**.

The reality is this: AI is becoming the ultimate specialist. When technical expertise is available at everyone’s fingertips, the “moat” around traditional specialization disappears. The real value has shifted from having the answer to knowing what to do with it.

Why the Supergeneralist is the key to a sustainable workforce



They connect the dots: While AI works in silos, Supergeneralists integrate insights across disciplines to solve complex, human-centric problems.



They provide the “human premium”: They bring the contextual judgment and ethical oversight that machines simply cannot replicate.



They offer true stability: 65% of HR leaders agree that AI will drive the rise of generalist roles. In an unpredictable market, versatility is the only sustainable talent strategy.

The future of work isn’t about humans vs. machines — it’s about a partnership where machines handle the “deep dive” and humans drive the strategy. The era of the specialist served us well, but the future belongs to the Supergeneralist.

Let’s get to work,

Sally Hunter

Sally Hunter

Executive Vice President — Revenue Strategy
Cielo



End of the specialist era



The AI evolution isn't eliminating jobs — it's creating demand for versatile talent who can work across traditional boundaries.

As organizations embrace an increasingly dynamic business landscape, a significant shift is occurring in workforce composition and talent strategy. Our research reveals a clear trend: the rise of the generalist professional who can adapt across domains, integrate diverse knowledge, and provide strategic value that AI cannot replicate.

This report explores how HR and talent professionals can prepare for and capitalize on this fundamental shift, offering practical insights for workforce planning, talent development, and organizational design in the age of AI-augmented work.

Methodology

We surveyed 302 senior HR executives across the North America, EMEA, and APAC regions. Respondents were sourced from the HRO Today global network and the RepData Panel Audience, with 75% holding director-level positions or above. The vast majority (97%) represented organizations with at least 500 full-time employees. The survey was conducted between August 1-September 25, 2025.

Definitions

Generalists (aka Supergeneralists)

Professionals with broad knowledge across multiple disciplines who excel at connecting insights, adapting to change, and orchestrating solutions. They thrive in ambiguity, integrate diverse perspectives, and focus on strategic problem-solving rather than technical execution.

Specialists

Professionals with deep expertise and technical skills in a specific discipline. They excel at solving complex problems within their domain of expertise and possess detailed knowledge of particular systems, methodologies, or subject areas.

Work is being redefined

Enter the Supergeneralist



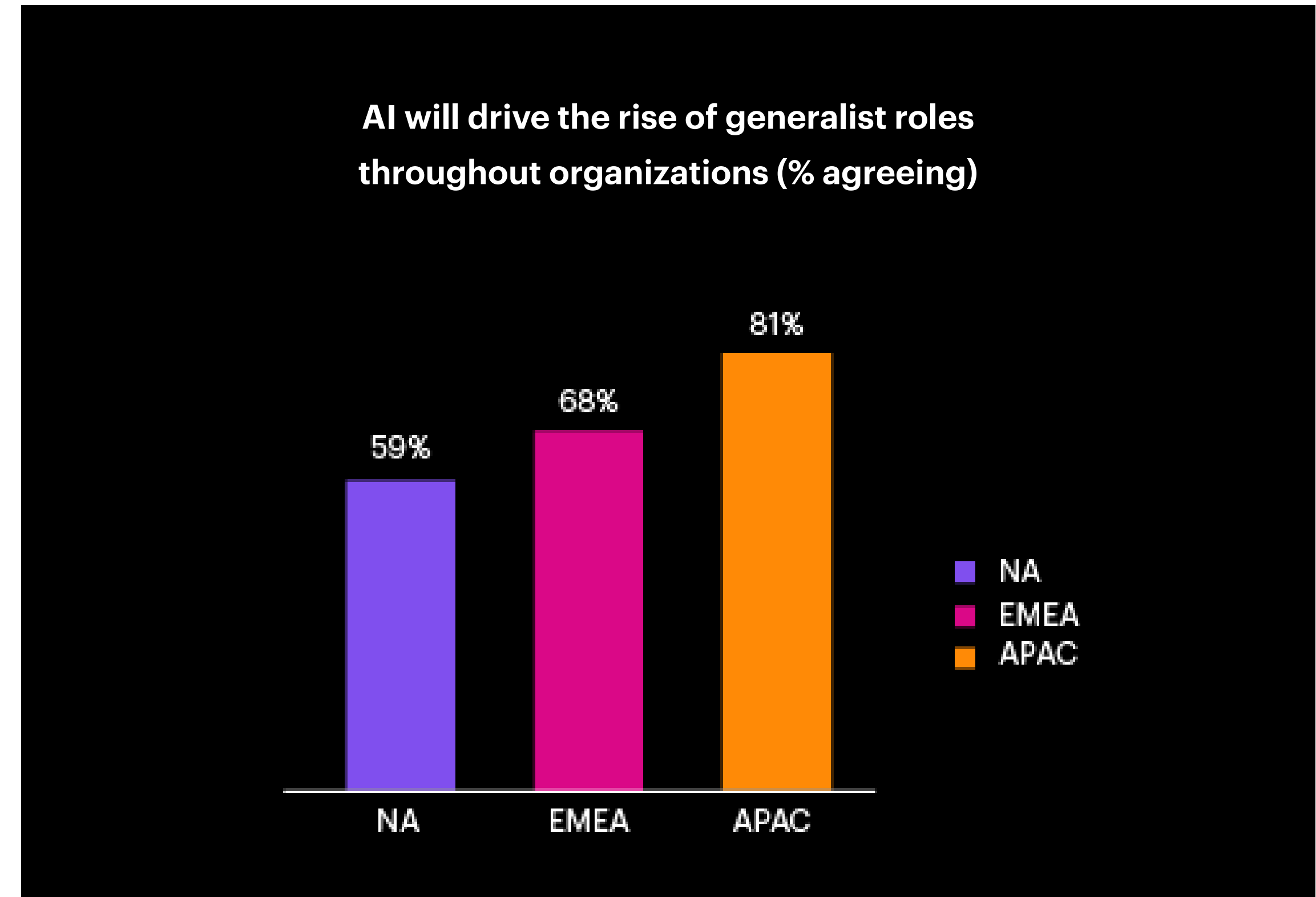
65% of HR leaders worldwide agree that AI will drive the rise of generalist roles.

AI sparks new possibilities in how roles are defined

As routine tasks, from data entry to legal review, are increasingly handled by intelligent tools, human value now centers on integrative problem-solving, a hallmark of generalists. Intelligent tools put specialized knowledge at everyone's fingertips, shifting success away from siloed expertise.

Instead, what stands out are the uniquely human abilities: contextual judgment, communication, and leadership.

There is a sharp contrast between regions. In the APAC region, 81% agree AI will drive the rise of generalist roles, significantly higher than in North America (59%) or EMEA (68%).



The judgment dividend

Human versatility is the new currency



HR's long-awaited seat at the strategic table isn't just arriving — it's becoming the command center for organizational transformation in the AI era.

Strategic evolution of human resources

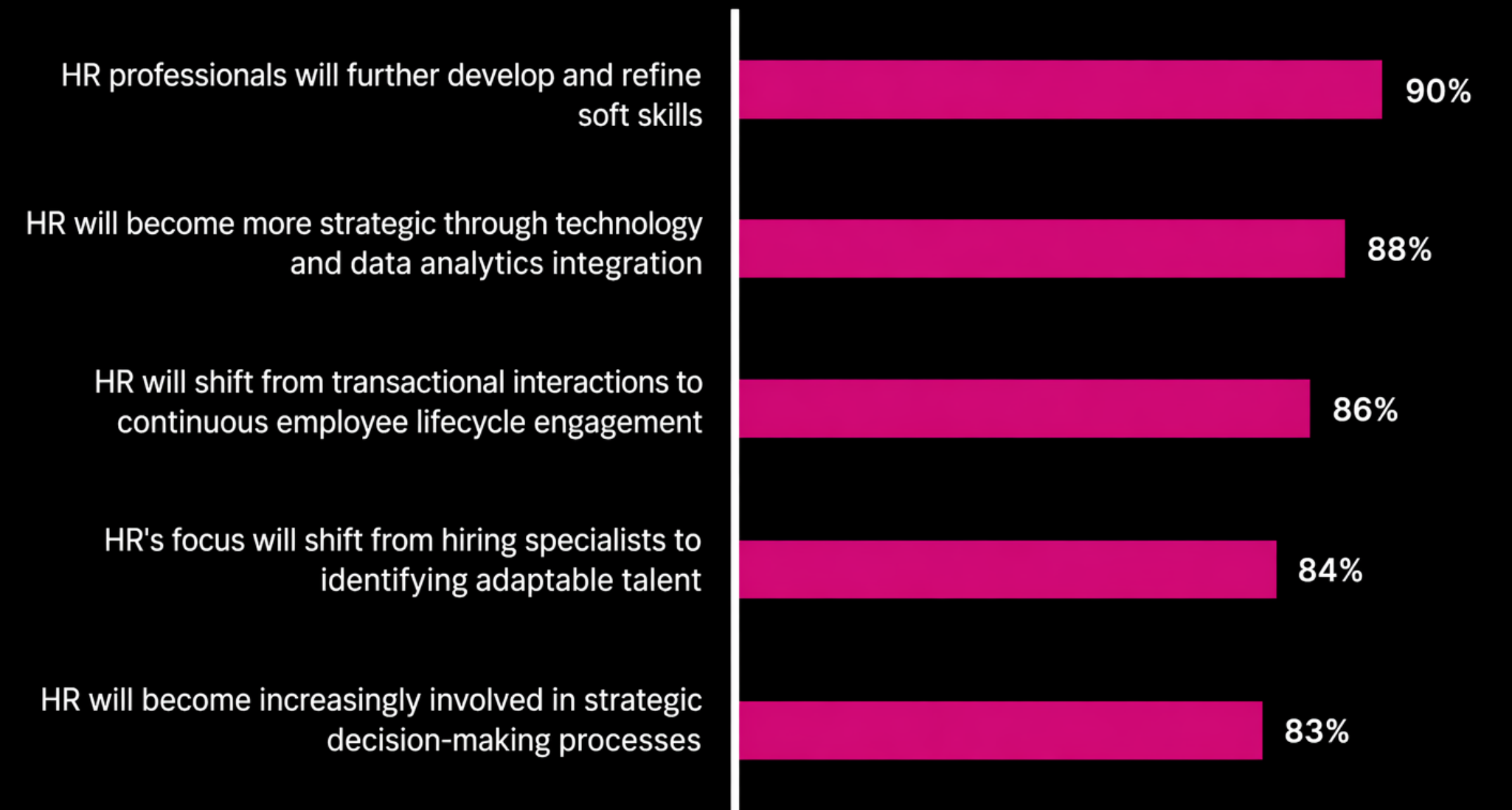
HR is transforming from administrative expert to strategic business partner. Our research shows leaders strongly agree that the shift from specialists to generalists will profoundly impact HR's role.

A majority of leaders agree that soft skills, also called “durable skills” for their lasting value, will shape HR's future. So, tomorrow's HR professionals must strengthen their communication, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. Technology and analytics will enable this evolution from technical tasks to strategic impact.

Rather than relying on annual surveys, companies are shifting toward continuous engagement across the entire employee lifecycle — from recruitment and onboarding to development and exit. Supergeneralists will engage more with “moments that matter” — such as promotions, role changes, parental leave, and exits — rather than only managing periodic transactions¹.

This evolution positions HR as a critical driver of organizational adaptation in the face of technological disruption. Rather than simply hiring new talent, HR is becoming the architect of workforce capability, designing talent strategies that balance specialized human and tech expertise with adaptable Supergeneralist skills.

Indicate how much you agree that the shift from specialists to generalists will impact HR's role (% agreeing)



REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

While North American respondents show the most skepticism toward HR transformation, they still recognize and support HR's increasingly strategic role. The EMEA region stands apart in its advocacy, showing the strongest support for prioritizing adaptable talent over specialists. Meanwhile, APAC has the highest confidence in HR's evolution, particularly when it comes to employee engagement initiatives.

Shifting focus in skill development



The skills that can't be automated — empathy, creativity, and strategic thinking — are becoming the new career currency, outvaluing technical expertise alone.

Learning shifts toward adaptability and judgment

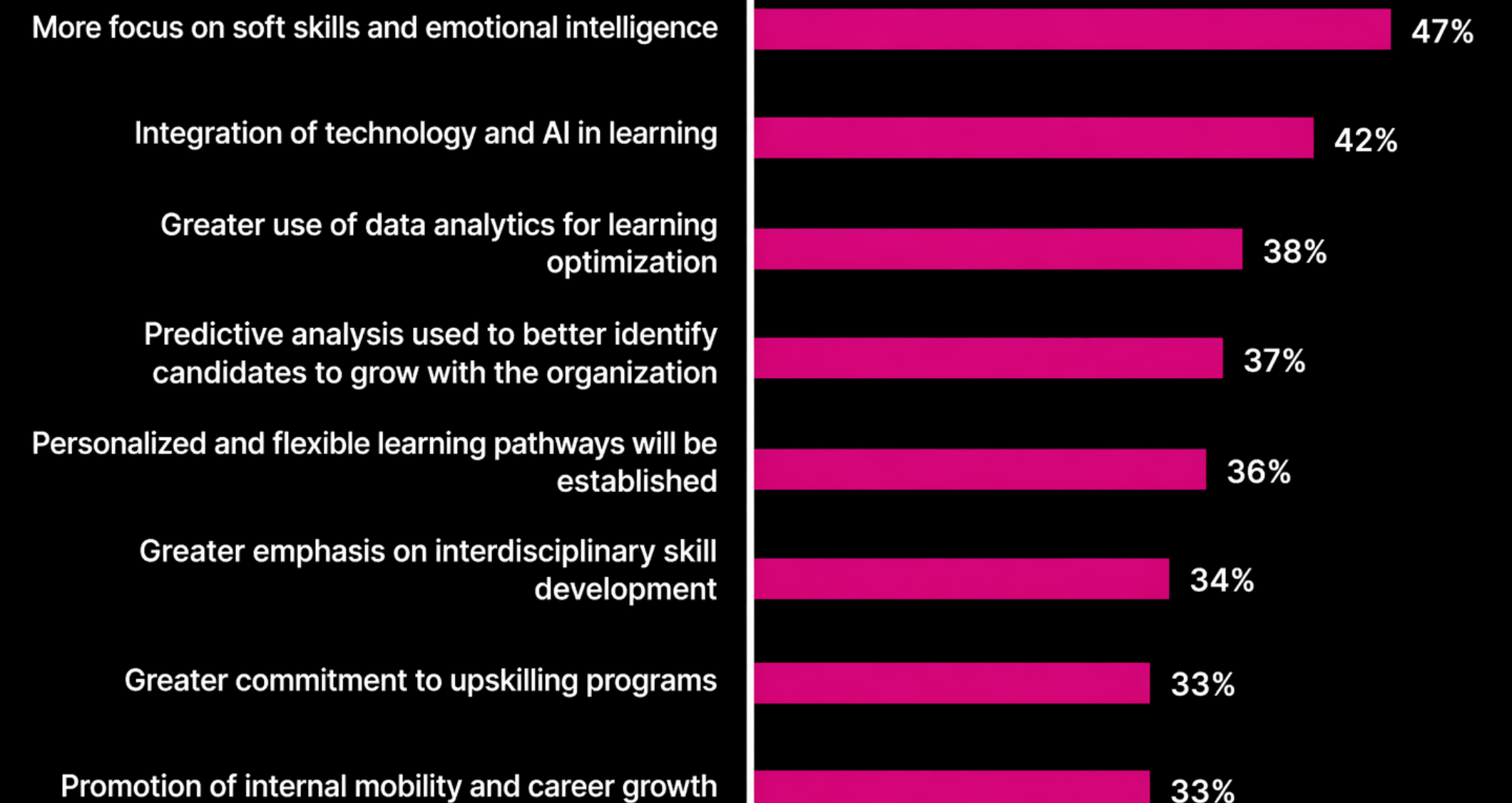
As organizations prepare for a future that values Supergeneralists, talent development strategies are evolving significantly. But views as to how that evolution will transpire vary greatly.

Nearly half of study participants indicated that they expect talent development to evolve to include more focus on soft skills and emotional intelligence. This reflects a fundamental shift from technical expertise alone toward relational and adaptive capabilities as the foundation of performance.

The use of technology and AI to optimize learning is also one of the most widely anticipated directions for the future of talent development. As organizations lean more on Supergeneralists, the learning infrastructure is evolving to become more personalized, adaptive, scalable, and aligned with real-work performance and cross-domain learning².

As work becomes less functionally siloed, it's clear that emotional intelligence and adaptability are the defining skill set that allows Supergeneralists to thrive.

How do you expect talent development to evolve in response to the growing emphasis on generalist roles? (% agreeing)



REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

APAC placed the strongest emphasis on soft skills and emotional intelligence (54%), while North America prioritizes AI integration (47%) alongside robust soft skills training (49%). EMEA takes a more data-driven approach, focusing on analytics for learning optimization (44%) and personalized pathways (49%).

Beyond specialization

Reshaping career value



Adaptability is becoming the meta-skill that determines career longevity in an AI-accelerated workplace.

Breadth and depth coexist by design

Nearly two-thirds (61%) of senior HR leaders agree organizations will prioritize employees who can adapt, learn new skills, and drill down into key areas when needed. This represents a fundamental shift from hiring for current skills toward hiring for learning agility and adaptability.

Companies are increasingly moving toward skills classifications, skills-based hiring, and internal mobility programs that can identify and reward both breadth (learning agility) and depth (specialist expertise). This dual focus allows organizations to maintain necessary specialized capabilities while building the adaptive capacity needed for uncertain futures.

To what extent do you agree with each of the statements below as it applies to total workforce development? (% agreeing)

Organizations will prioritize employees who can adapt, learn new skills across multiple areas, and also go deep in key areas.

61%

While specialists will continue to be vital in areas like engineering, AI, or medicine, their expertise will be increasingly often embedded in roles that require cross-functional awareness.

40%

Workforce development will include teams and learning paths that combine both generalists and specialists, supported by creative problem-solving and effective human automation collaboration.

34%



REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Regional perspectives on workforce development vary significantly: 70% of respondents in APAC believe HR will be an early adopter of a shift toward generalist roles — higher than in any other region. Accelerated growth in markets such as India, Southeast Asia, and China is intensifying change and expansion pressures, fueling demand for versatile HR professionals with broad, cross-functional capabilities instead of narrow specialization.

The front line of change

Supergeneralist era begins



The functions that manage human complexity — HR and customer experience — will be the first to evolve beyond specialization, creating models for the rest of the organization.

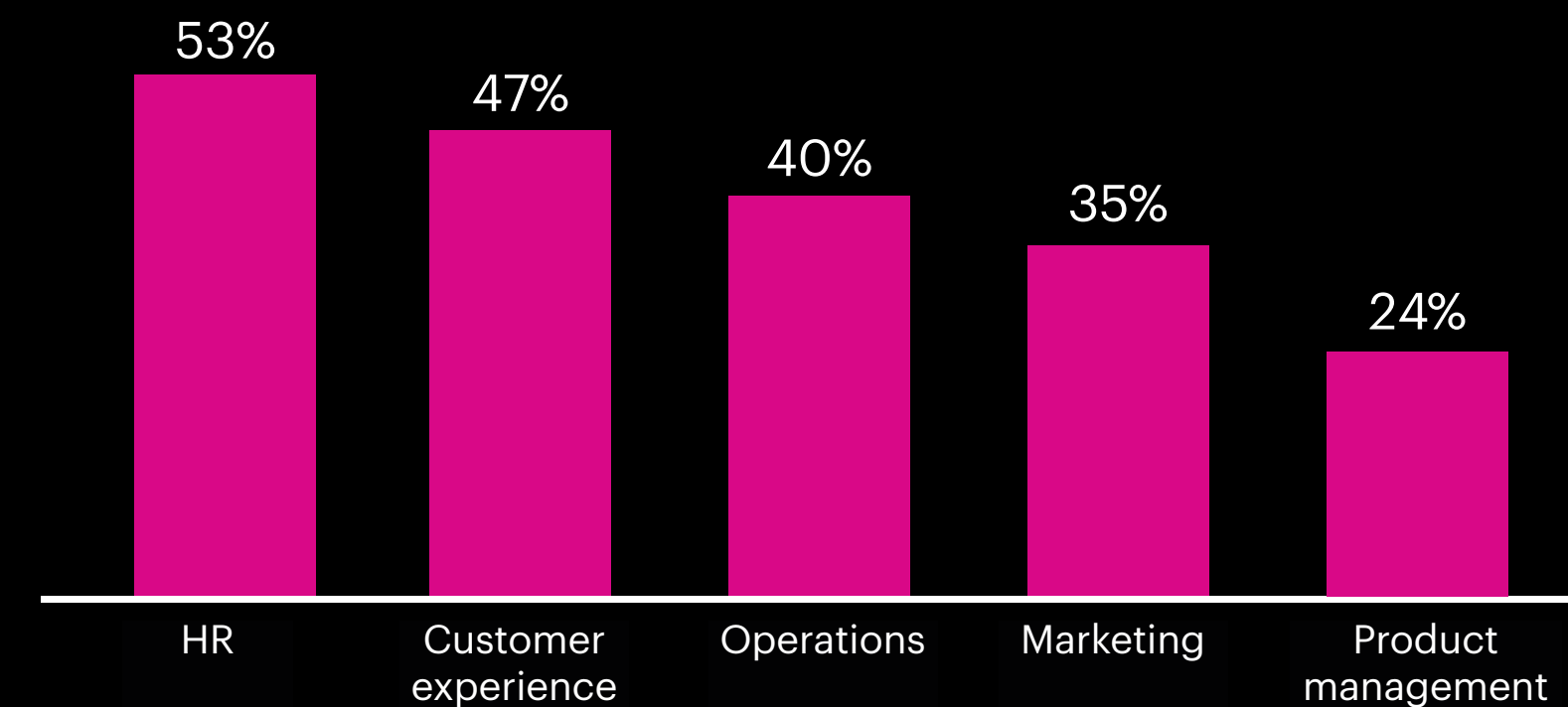
HR and customer experience adopt first

The study shows that the organizational functions most likely to adopt generalist roles early on are the people-centric areas of human resources (53%) and customer experience (47%).

With AI increasingly embedded in organizational operations, HR's responsibilities now span technology alignment, ethics, change management, and culture — demanding broader, more versatile skill sets rather than narrow specialization.

Customer service is moving from specialized knowledge roles to AI-enabled generalist roles where humans focus on judgment, empathy, navigation across functions, and full ownership of customer problems.

Which organizational functions are likely to adopt generalist roles first? (% agreeing)



REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

APAC stands out with 70% believing HR will lead the adoption of generalist roles, while EMEA points to operations (46%) and North America uniquely identifies marketing (40%).

Cost center to capability engine

Reskilling is just the beginning — HR's true power lies in strategically orchestrating how work gets done, blending human potential with AI capabilities to drive organizational success.

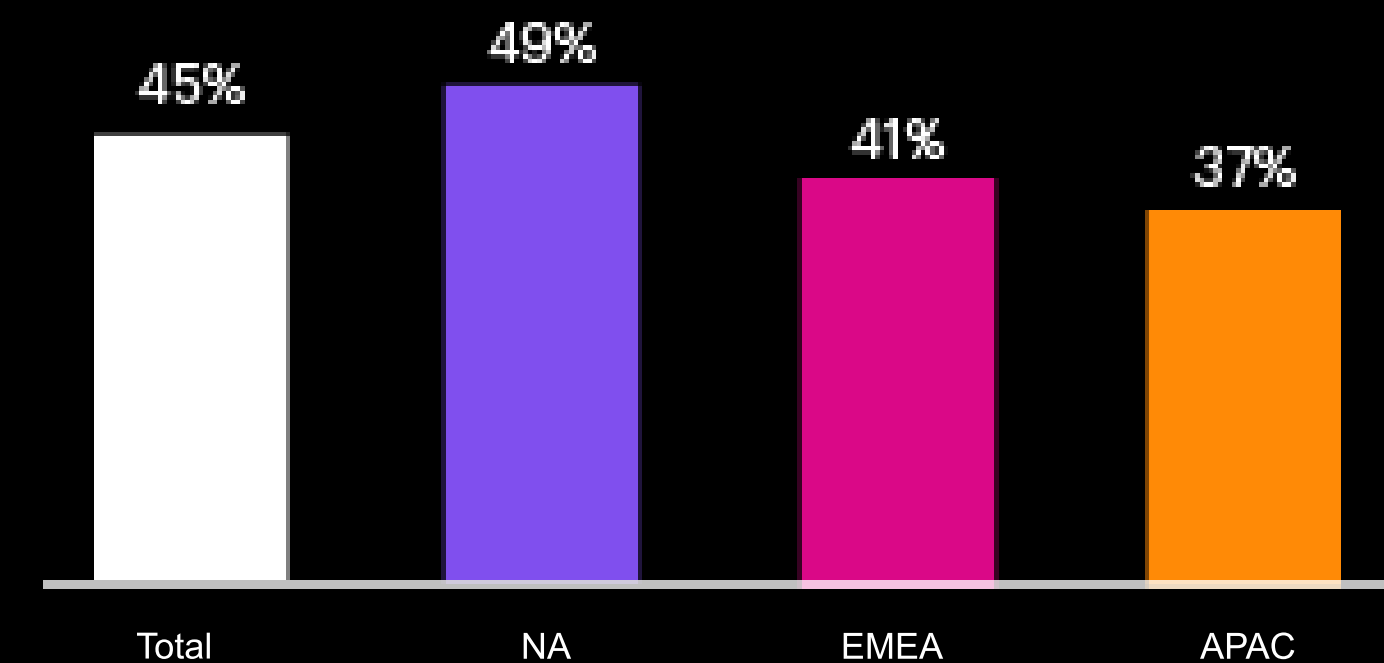
Orchestration becomes the critical capability

When asked about factors having the greatest impact on HR's relevance, reskilling/upskilling the workforce emerged as the clear leader. In total, 45% of all participants identified it as the top factor, more than double any of the other five factors examined (increased alignment with business strategy, AI, economic volatility, DEI programs, and inflation).

In North America, 49% of respondents — more than in any other region — were most likely to identify reskilling/upskilling.

As organizations respond to AI disruption, they're turning to HR to lead skills strategy, internal mobility, workforce data, and critical decisions about how work gets done. In their emerging role as strategic advisors, HR leaders must determine the optimal mix of human capability and technology while closing skills gaps. Success now hinges on these strategic choices, propelling HR from cost center to capability engine through aligned training, deployment and measurement.

**Which factor will have the greatest impact on HR's relevance?
(% of respondents who selected "reskilling/upskilling")**



The agility advantage

Skills intelligence for competitive edge

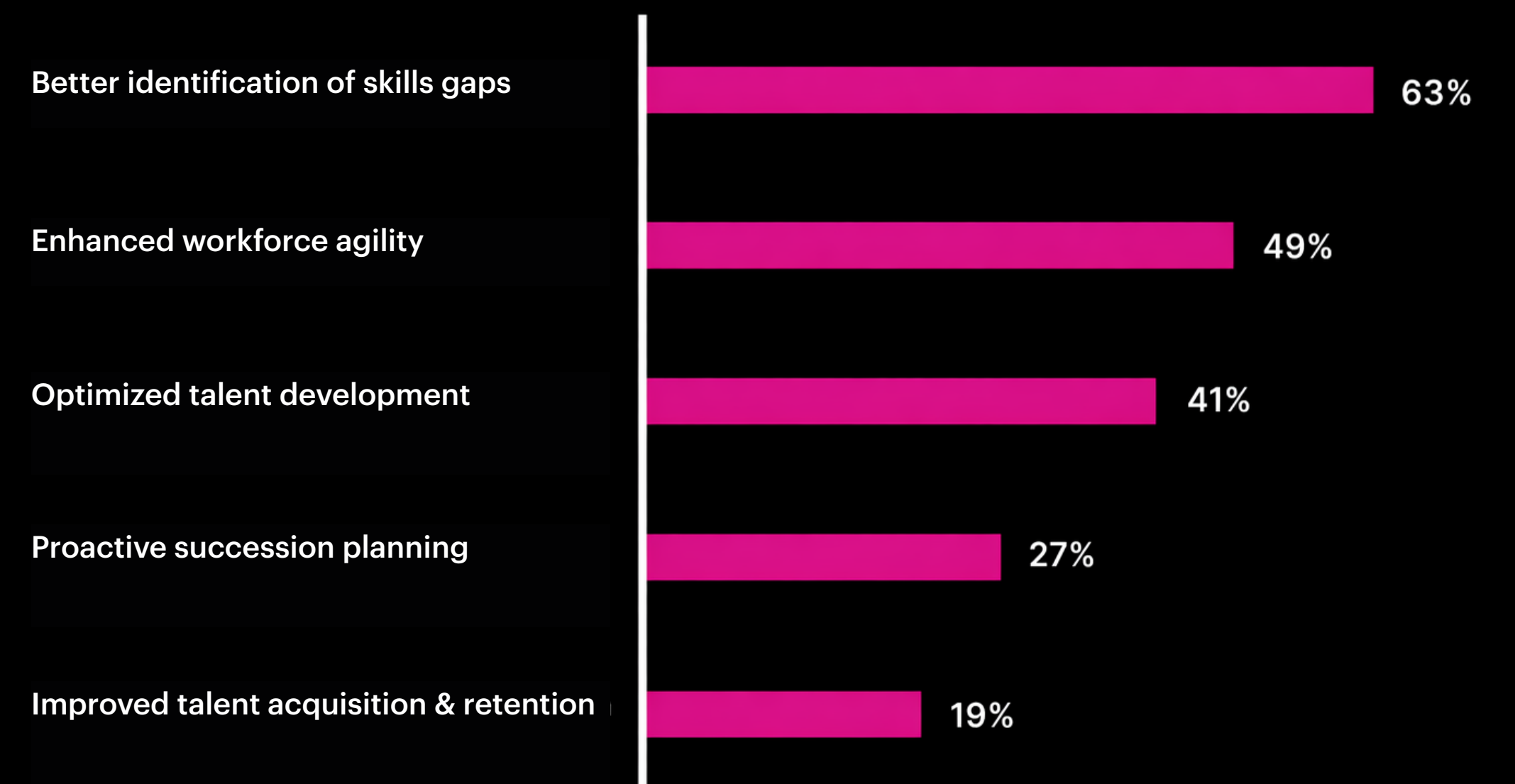
Skills intelligence is becoming the new competitive intelligence — organizations that can map, develop, and deploy capabilities faster than competitors will win the talent race.

Capability mapping informs strategy.

Our study sheds light on the ways HR leaders plan to use skills intelligence — the visibility into employee aptitudes and abilities — to transform their workforces and outpace the competition.

Skills intelligence primarily helps pinpoint gaps, according to 63% of HR leaders. By identifying the skills required to meet organizational objectives, HR and talent acquisition can more effectively determine hiring priorities, focus training efforts, and optimize talent deployment.

How will gaining visibility into employee aptitudes and abilities — commonly referred to as skills intelligence — help transform the workforce?



REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Responses show significant regional differences in how gaining visibility to skills intelligence will transform the workforce. Approximately 72% of APAC respondents indicated this visibility will result in better identification of skills gaps, compared to 57% of North America and 69% of EMEA participants.

Building tomorrow's talent

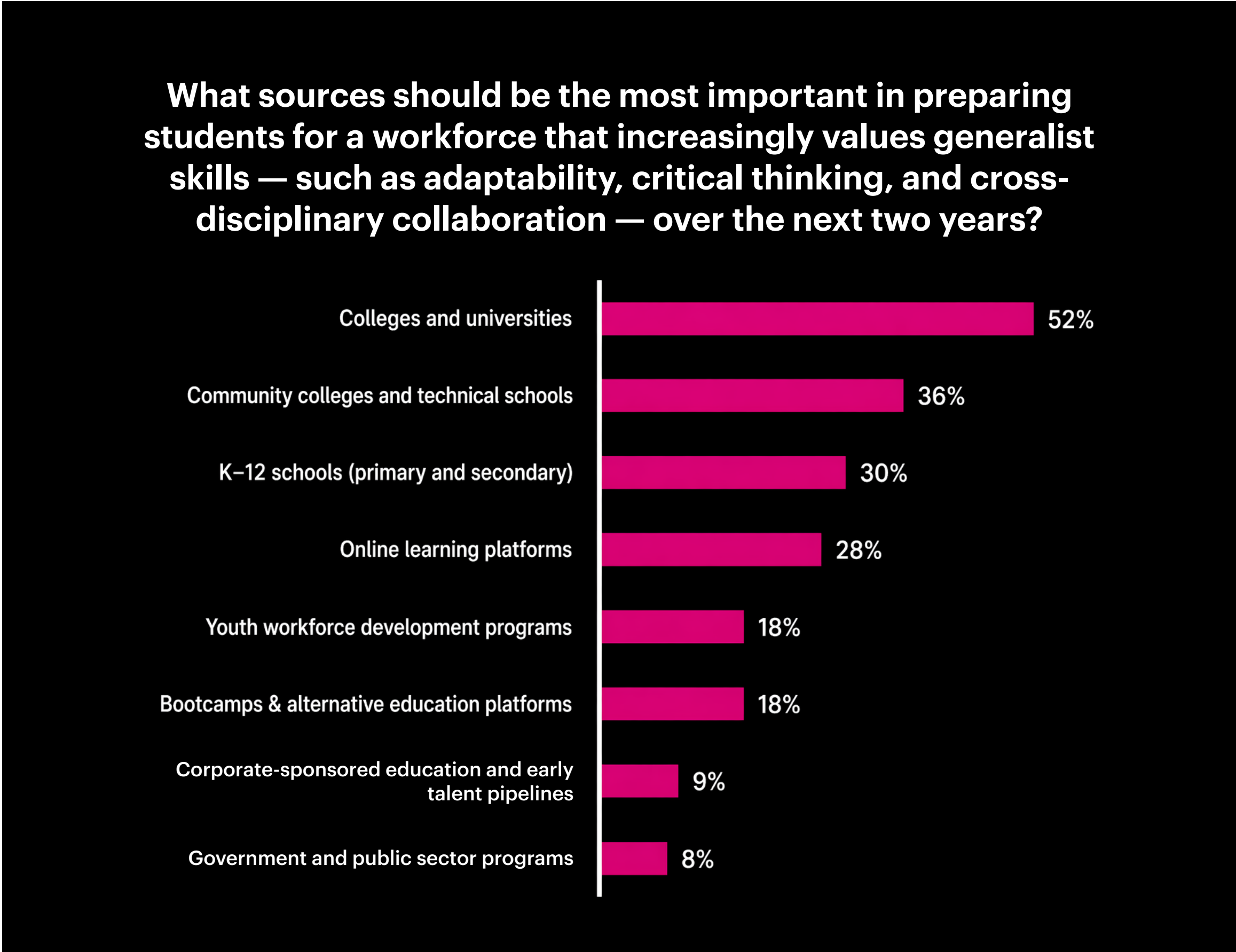
New educational blueprint for versatile professionals

The education system faces a fundamental challenge — preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist requires teaching versatility over vocational specificity.

Learning expands beyond traditional pathways

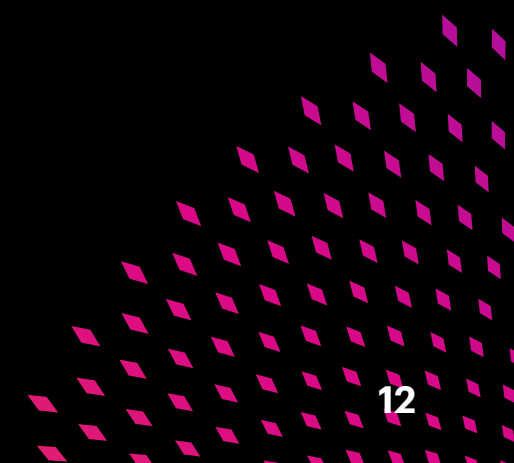
As organizations increasingly value Supergeneralist skills, HR leaders point to colleges and universities as the most important educational sources for preparing students for this shift. More than half (52%) of senior HR leaders identified higher education as the primary pathway for developing a more versatile and adaptable workforce.

The results suggest that while traditional higher education continues to be seen as the primary driver of generalist skill development, organizations also acknowledge the contribution of alternative and non-traditional learning pathways.



REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

APAC shows the strongest embrace of community colleges (50%) and alternative platforms like bootcamps (30%), while North America focuses on more traditional pathways such as universities (49%) and K-12 education (43%). EMEA takes the lead in online learning adoption (37%), demonstrating the most diverse approach to educational sources.



Regional snapshot

Where your market stands

NA

The balanced innovator

- Highest focus on reskilling/upskilling
- Strong emphasis on traditional education pathways
- Most measured approach to HR transformation

EMEA

The data-driven transformer

- Strongest belief in shift from specialists to Supergeneralists
- Leading in data analytics for learning optimization
- Highest emphasis on personalized learning pathways

APAC

The agility-first frontrunner

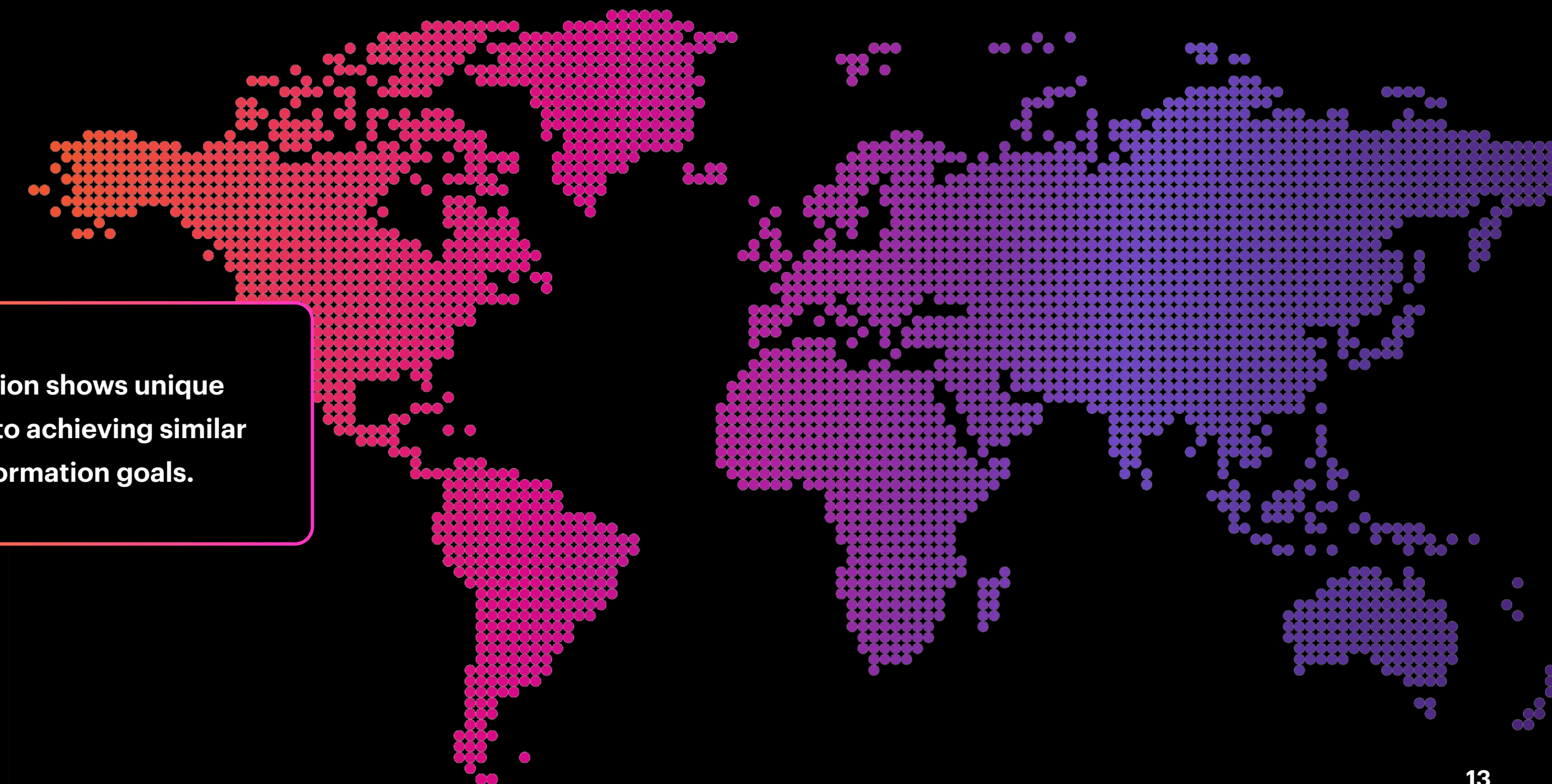
- Highest confidence in HR's strategic evolution
- Leading in generalist adoption
- Strongest focus on soft skills and emotional intelligence

CROSS-REGIONAL INSIGHTS

Technology adoption rates and regulatory environments shape regional approaches.

Cultural contexts influence talent development strategies.

Each region shows unique pathways to achieving similar transformation goals.



Reimagining talent acquisition

How to hire Supergeneralists

The traditional job is becoming obsolete — tomorrow's roles will be defined by problems to solve rather than tasks to complete.

Steps to identify adaptable talent

As AI automates specialized tasks, human versatility becomes the priority. The greatest hiring risk isn't a missing skill, but limited adaptability as roles evolve. To close this gap, organizations must move beyond static roles and focus on capabilities that flex with changing needs. Take these steps to build an agile, future-ready workforce of Supergeneralists.

1

Revise job descriptions and requirements to emphasize adaptability, learning agility, and cross-functional experience alongside technical requirements.

2

Develop assessment methods that evaluate candidates' ability to learn, adapt, and apply knowledge across domains.

3

Create interview processes that probe for examples of versatility, knowledge integration, and receptivity to change.

4

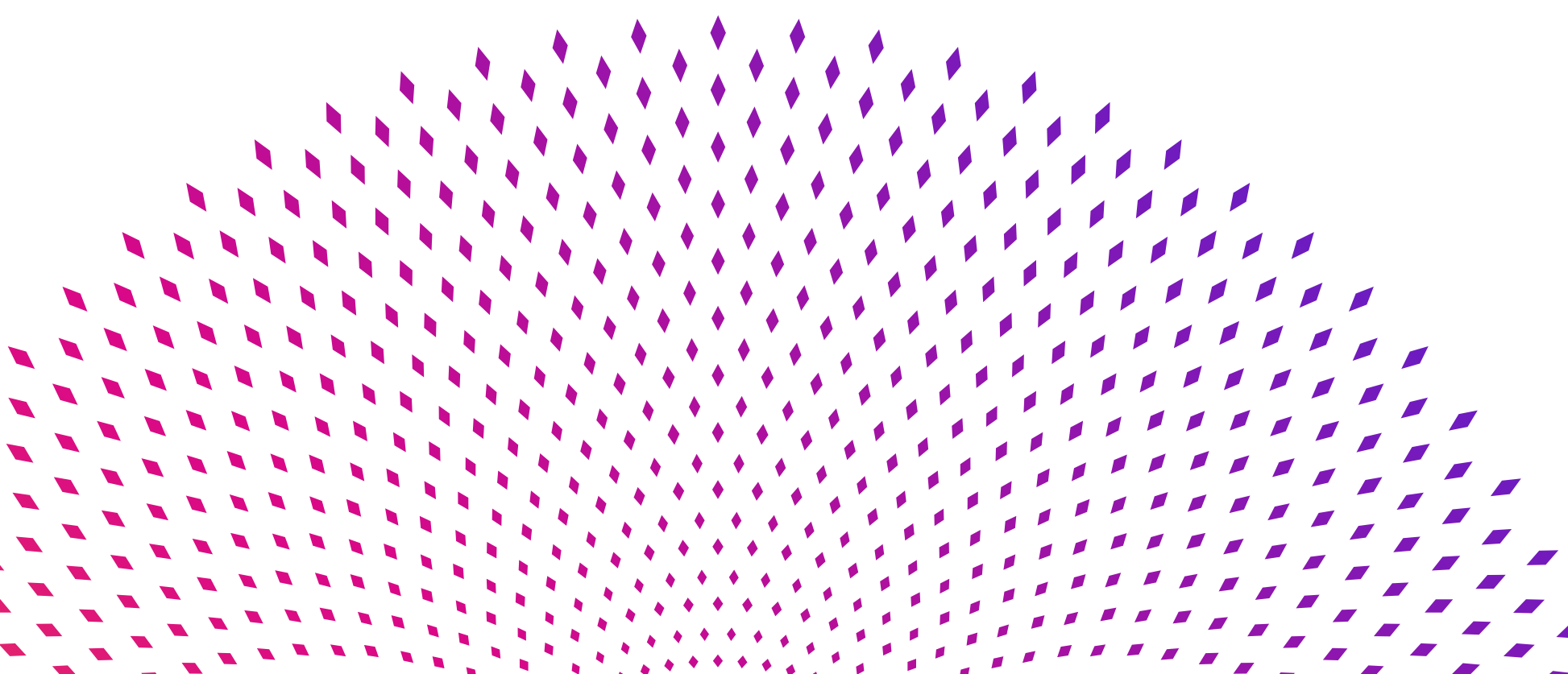
Build talent pipelines that include non-traditional candidates with diverse experiences rather than narrow specializations.

How to build Supergeneralists

Learning agility is replacing learning completion as the key metric — how quickly employees can apply new knowledge matters more than what they already know.

Approaches to develop adaptability across the workforce

To stay ahead, your workforce needs to be as agile as the technology that powers it. This means moving past deep silos and encouraging people to solve problems across the business. Take these steps to enable expertise that flows and adapts as organizational priorities shift.



1

Implement rotation programs for employees to explore different business areas.

2

Develop learning pathways that combine technical depth with breadth across related domains.

3

Create mentorship programs that pair specialists with those from different functions.

4

Utilize AI-powered learning platforms that can identify skill adjacencies and recommend personalized development opportunities.

5

Measure learning effectiveness not just by knowledge acquisition but by application across contexts.

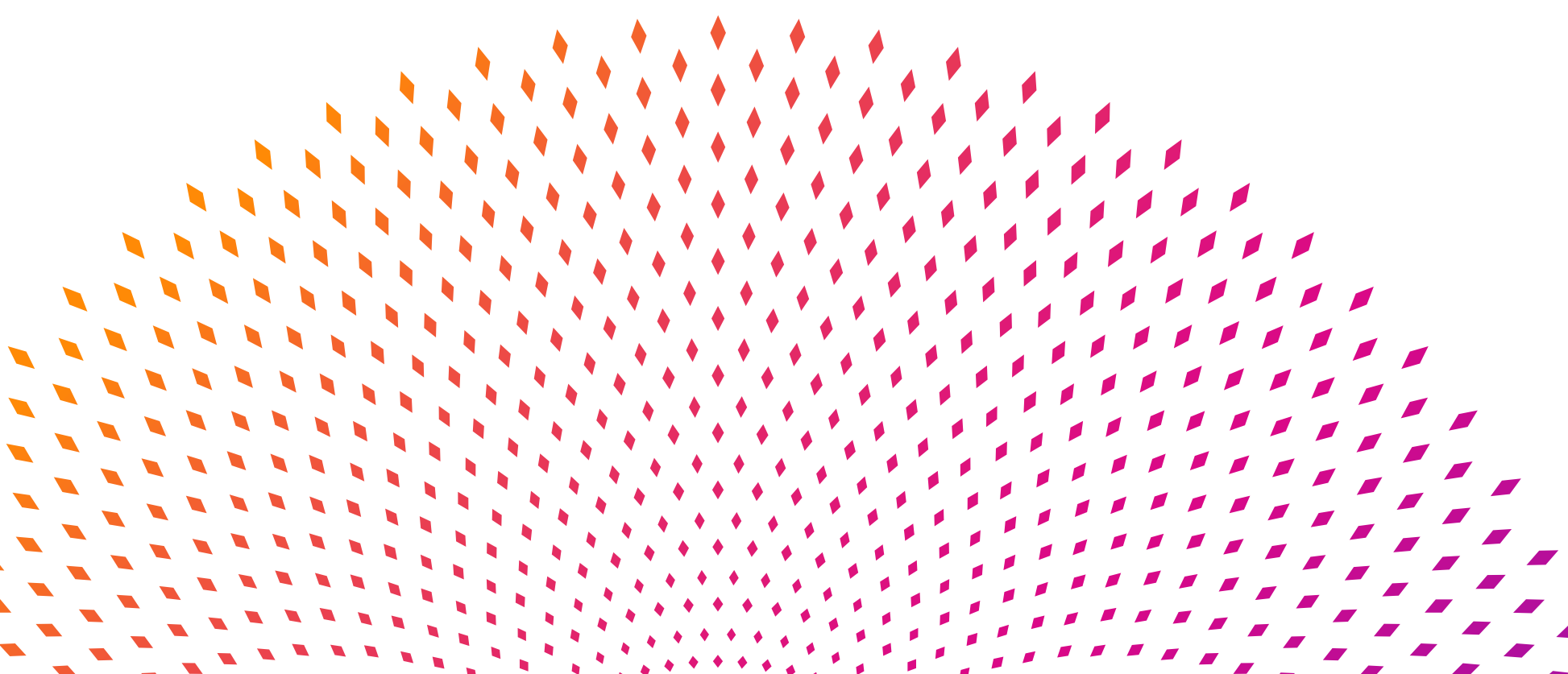
Built for agility

Redesigning organizational structures

The organizational chart is evolving from a static hierarchy to a dynamic network where value comes from connections between specialists orchestrated by Supergeneralists.

Structural changes that enable flexibility and integration

Supergeneralists thrive in environments designed for connection, not constraint. As work becomes more fluid and AI absorbs specialized tasks, organizations must rethink how teams are structured and resourced. Take these steps to enable expertise that flows and adapts as organizational priorities shift.



1

Create cross-functional teams led by generalists who can orchestrate specialized resources.

2

Establish centers of excellence that combine specialist expertise with generalist coordination.

3

Develop matrix structures that allow for flexible resource allocation based on changing needs.

4

Implement agile methodologies beyond technology teams to enhance organizational adaptability.

5

Design career paths that promote and reward both depth and breadth of experience.

The human advantage

Orchestrating the AI evolution

Organizations must proactively integrate human versatility with AI capabilities to lead the next generation of business transformation.

This is how advantage is built

Supergeneralists reflect a clear shift in how advantage is created. Rather than relying on specialization, organizations are now gaining an edge by combining breadth and depth. Investing in AI without rethinking talent architecture limits impact. Real value is created when work is deliberately designed to connect insight, context, and expertise across the organization.

As AI reshapes work, Supergeneralists represent a pivotal shift in workforce deployment. Success in this new era depends on ecosystems where specialists evolve alongside AI, with Supergeneralists orchestrating expertise and technology to solve complex business challenges.





About Cielo

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