Visier Insights™ Report

Hidden in the Headcount: The State of Workforce Transformation During the AI Reckoning

What 3.6 million employee records reveal about restructuring and hiring differently in the age of AI



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Table of contents

Introduction **03**

The workforce is being reshuffled, and not everybody wins **06**

Same team, opposite fates: Hiring trends are role-specific **09**

Organizations are increasingly prioritizing mid-career hires **13**

Takeaways for CHROs and People Leaders **15**

Research Method **17**



Few topics have dominated the workplace more in recent years than the way AI is reshaping business, and what that means for the workforce. Executives have named AI and technology their top investment priorities for 2026, focusing on accelerating adoption and building internal expertise.[1] Yet, employees do not share that enthusiasm: 52% of respondents in a Pew Research Center survey expressed concern over AI's future workplace impact, and 32% fear it will ultimately limit their long–term job opportunities.[2]

Forecasts and predictions abound, but what do we really know about AI's actual impact on organizations and their people so far? The data tells a messier story than the headlines suggest. Reports of mass layoffs[3] are offset by the rise of expensive "layoff boomerang" hiring.[4] Claims of a "Great Flattening"[5] have been debunked as a niche phenomenon,[6] not the dominant trend. And big hopes for robotics deployment hit a wall at companies like Krispy Kreme, where robots could not replicate the human touch required to make a donut.[7]

We've studied these trends and demystified the myths ourselves, but there is still so much to uncover about AI's true influence on organizations and their workforce.

> Forecasts and predictions abound, but what do we really know about AI's actual impact on organizations and their people so far?

For the present study, the Visier research team took a two-pronged approach to building our understanding of how AI may have affected the transformation of the workforce in the past four years.

- For one, we looked inside organizations, **drawing on data from over 3.6 million live employee records from more than 155 enterprise-sized organizations in the Visier Community Data** to track how workforce composition across job domains has shifted, away from and toward, specific job domains, subdomains, and employee age groups. This helps deepen our understanding about the changing demand for certain roles, and can help inform where to focus investment in internal moves, reskilling, and hiring.

- We also **conducted structured interviews with employees in job domains that stood out in our data**. We've captured key highlights in this report to offer a window into how jobs are, and aren't, changing at the individual level. Their accounts reinforce a key finding: AI's impact on work is highly personal and idiosyncratic, making blanket statements about workforce transformation more misleading than useful.

> 87% of business leaders say AI workforce strategy is business-critical. Just 5% of CHROs feel prepared. The reason isn't effort, but missing data.

The overall goal of this study is to demonstrate how real-time data about shifts in workforce composition and hiring trends combined with real-life perspectives from employees working these roles, can help CHROs and talent teams understand, anticipate, and prepare for present and future workforce transformation.

Key Findings at a Glance

1

The workforce is being reshuffled, and not everybody wins

Since the emergence of generative AI, workforce composition across 155+ enterprises has shifted, letting new winners and losers emerge. What surprised us the most? HR didn't make the cut, and DE&I is dead.

2

Same team, opposite fates: hiring trends are role-specific

The jobs being filled have significantly shifted, revealing changing demands for various skills. As the share of AI Engineers hired grew by 251%, that of data scientists fell 32%—and all inside the same domain.

3

Organizations are increasingly prioritizing mid-career hires

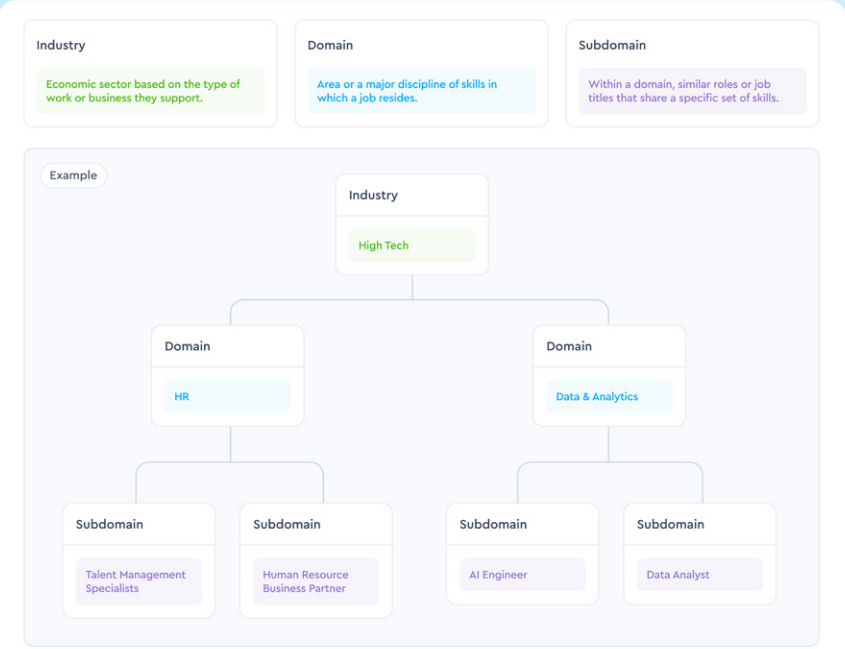
Hiring rates declined by 24%, from 29% in 2022 to 22% in 2026, and young employees still make the largest share of new hires. But if current trends continue, employees aged 35–50 could soon make up the biggest group of new hires.

Our lens into workforce transformation: Job domains

To explore how organizations have been reshaping their workforce composition in the past four years, we chose to investigate changes in job domains and subdomains, rather than industry as our unit of analysis. All jobs in our database have been standardized to a common taxonomy where jobs are organized by the primary skills identified in each job description, and are structured into a three-tiered hierarchy: domain, subdomain, and job name. As shown in the figure (figure: The Hierarchy of Work):

- The **domain** is the broadest level, representing a major discipline of skills such as Engineering, Sales, Marketing, Finance, HR, or IT. For this report, we analyzed 30 domains.
- The **subdomain** is the second level, representing a collection of roles that share a specific set of skills within a domain, for example, data scientist or data analyst within the Data & Analytics domain. For this report, we analyzed 341 subdomains.
- A third level exists below subdomains that represents the exact job or role of an employee such as HR analyst, customer experience analyst or supply chain analyst within the Data Analyst subdomain. This level of specificity is not included in our analysis.

The Hierarchy of Work



Source: Research & Insights, Visier Inc. 2026

A look at domains to understand workforce transformation is helpful because domains are largely industry-agnostic: for example, a hospital, a bank, and a manufacturer all have Finance, HR, and IT functions that look structurally similar.

At the same time, changes in workforce composition by domain may indicate that a company moves away from what its industry label suggests. For example: A bank with a growing IT or Data & Analytics domain—a change often driven by the business, not HR—may be making a strategic shift to becoming a technology company, long before annual headcount reports capture this change.

KEY FINDING #1

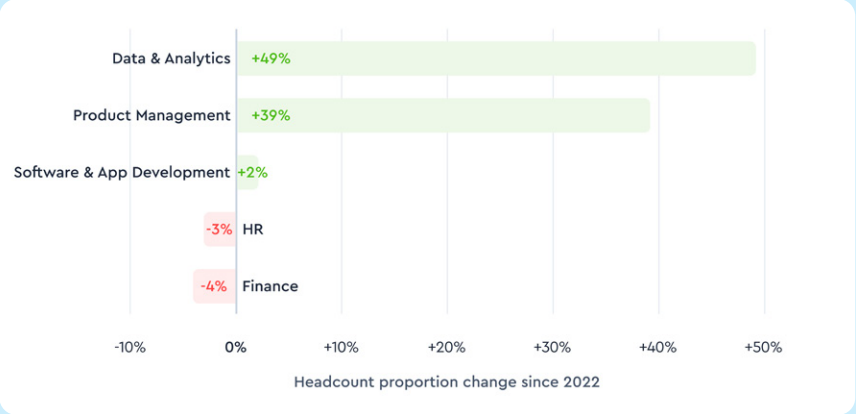
The workforce is being reshuffled, and not everybody wins

Since the emergence of generative AI, workforce composition across 155+ enterprises has shifted, letting new winners and losers emerge. What surprised us the most? HR didn't make the cut, and DE&I is dead.

Between 2022 and 2026, we tracked how big each domain, like Finance, HR, or Data & Analytics, was as a share of the whole workforce, and how that share has changed over time. Across the 30 domains in our analysis, we found that 13 domains experienced a significant increase in share relative to the workforce headcount, 11 saw a decline, and six saw no significant changes in their share of headcount.[8]

These workforce shifts stood out: while the share of Data & Analytics professionals across organizations grew by 49%, followed by Product Management at 39%, HR's share shrank by 3% and Finance by 4%. Software & App Development barely moved, growing just 2% but insignificantly.[9] (Figure: The workforce is being reshuffled and not everybody wins.)

The workforce is being reshuffled and not everybody wins



Source: Research & Insights, Visier Inc. 2026



EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

How AI workforce transformation affects the finance domain

One startup CFO built an AI-powered operating system that pulls finance, sales, operations, and contracts into a single platform, automating month-end close and FP&A reporting. His view: once processes, controls, and KPIs are properly designed, a dedicated FP&A function becomes redundant.

> "Once you prescribe the formula, and you have your KPIs and your metrics... the system will do it for you."

Even though our data does not allow a conclusion about the causal impact of AI on these domain shifts, a redistribution of headcount growth and decline by domain has clearly happened.

> **Companies may be investing in turning AI capability into products, while HR and Finance shrink as routine tasks get automated.**

The fact that domains such as Data & Analytics, and Product Management experienced significant growth suggests that companies may have begun to invest in turning AI capability into products. In contrast, the decline in headcount in domains such as HR and Finance could indicate that these functions began reducing headcount due to automation of some routine tasks.

AI is transforming software development from the inside out

The fact that the Software & App Development domain has not seen a significant change in headcount proportion might seem surprising due to the AI exposure in this domain; however, anecdotal evidence from our interviews with software domain experts suggests a '"redistribution" trend, where titles inside the domain are changing while the domain's overall footprint stays flat.



EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

How AI workforce transformation affects the software domain

One software development leader described a shift from deep specialization toward orchestration. As AI fills expertise gaps, traditional silos like front-end, back-end, and QA are dissolving. Headcount isn't shrinking—titles are collapsing.

> **"Most software developers start to de-specialize. And instead specialize in developing specialists,"** they said.



KEY FINDING #2

Same team, opposite fates: Hiring trends are role-specific

The jobs being filled have significantly shifted, revealing changing demands for various skills. As the share of AI Engineers hired grew by 251%, that of data scientists fell 32%—and all inside the same domain.

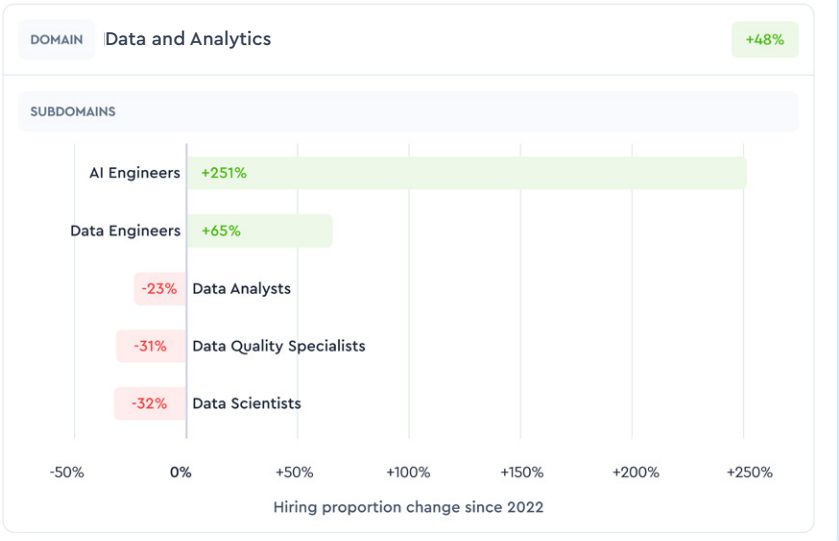
We also looked for changing hiring patterns during the same period. We found that even within domains, hiring trends can vary widely when it comes to specializations reflected in subdomains.[10]

How AI affects the data and analytics domain

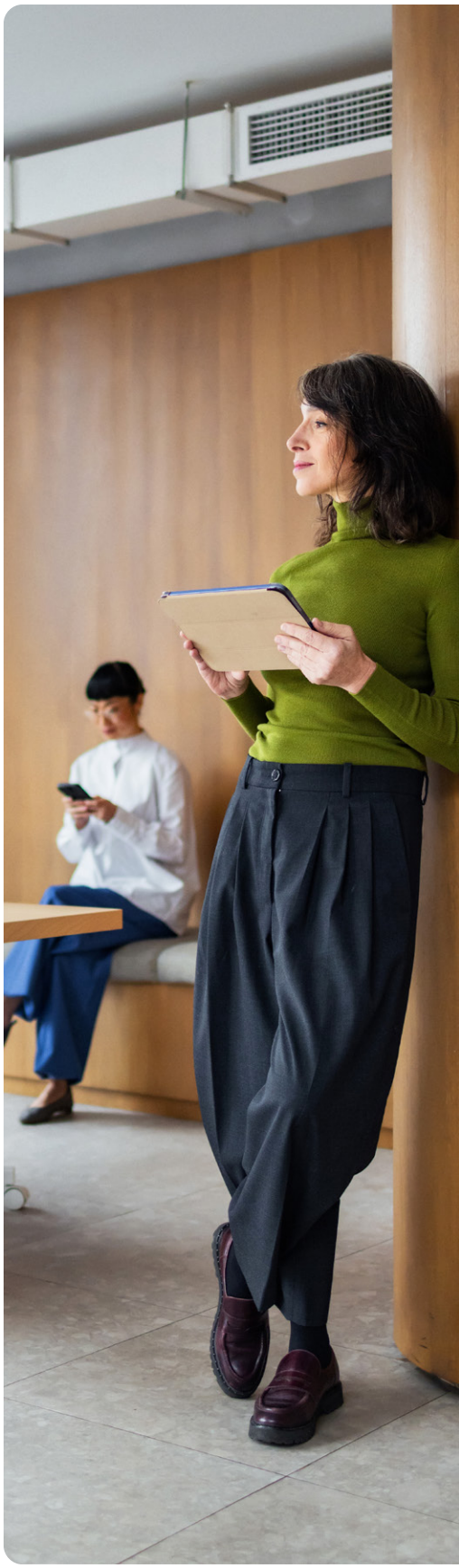
As shown in the example for Data & Analytics professionals (figure: Same team, opposite fates: Hiring trends are role-specific), their share in all hiring overall grew by 48%, but the change in their hiring share was actually flat (2%) at first (from the beginning of 2023 to the start of 2025). It then jumped 45% in the period beginning in 2025 until May 2026.[11]

Data & Analytics domain hiring sees a surge in the backdrop of AI

Same team, opposite fates: Hiring trends are role-specific



Source: Research & Insights, Visier Inc. 2026



Still, hiring trends vary significantly by subdomain, and those differences reveal where demand for specific skills is heading:

AI Engineers

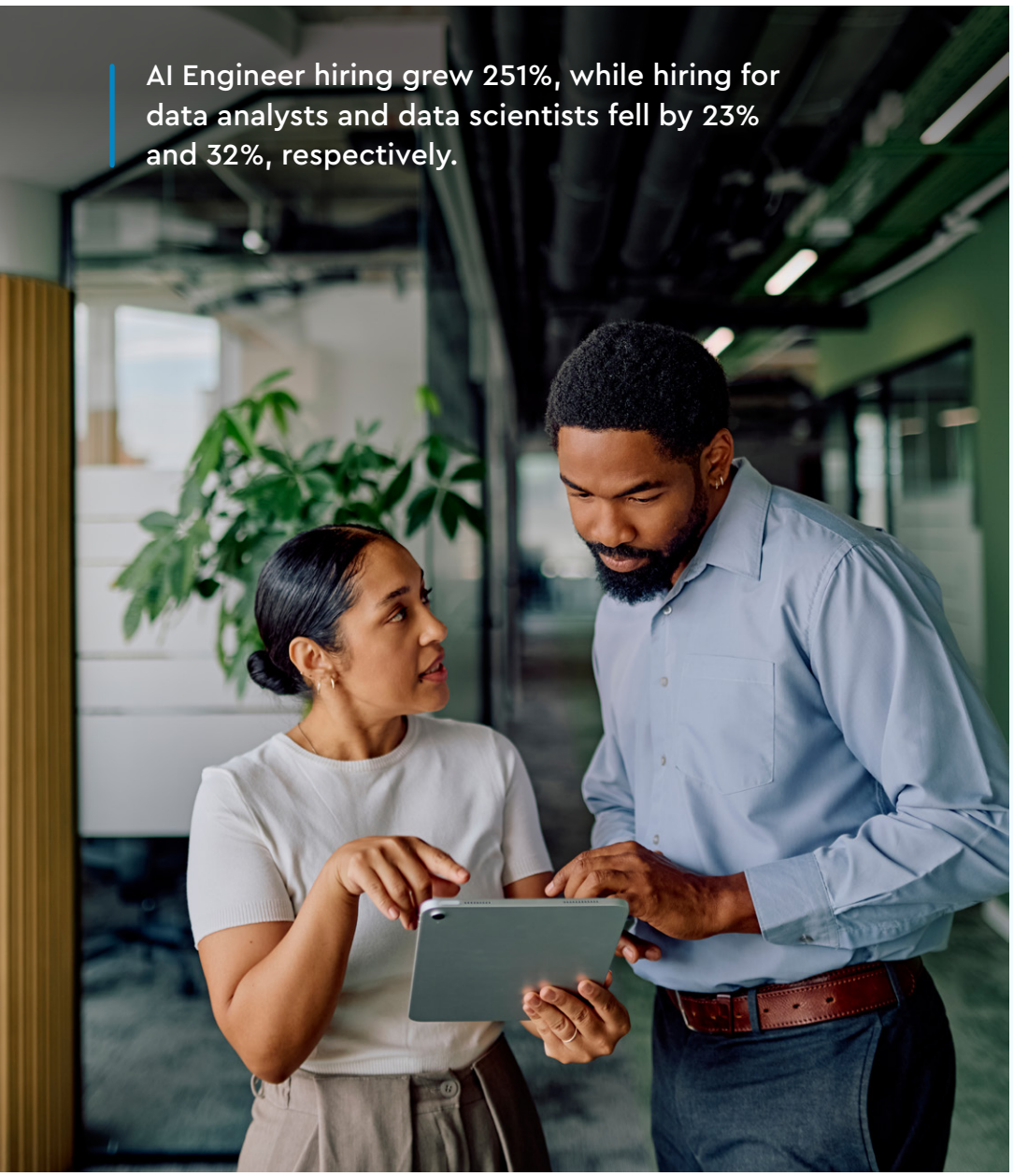
Still the smallest by headcount proportion overall, there was a 251% larger share of AI Engineers hired within the Data & Analytics domain.[12]

Data Analysts

Still the largest share of the headcount overall, but the share of data analysts hired in this domain declined by 23%.

Data Scientists

Still make up the second largest subdomain by headcount share, but this subdomain experienced a decline in hiring share by 32%.



> AI Engineer hiring grew 251%, while hiring for data analysts and data scientists fell by 23% and 32%, respectively.

EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

How AI workforce transformation affects the data and analytics domain

One Senior GenAI Engineer has moved from software engineering to data science to a role that barely existed a few years ago. Now his company's first AI engineer, he translates new practices for technical and non-technical colleagues alike

> "There is a shift away from vibe coding....to Agentic Engineering, which is looking at creating specifications for a system or an architecture—then orchestrating agents to actually complete that work," he says.

Very human reactions to a very AI world

Our conversations with professionals reveal that AI's impact on day-to-day operations is anything but uniform. The way AI technologies reshape workflows in different ways across job domains creates a "mixed reality," serving as both an accelerator and a barrier, depending on the role.

For example, a software lead noted that business stakeholders now demand unprecedented speed in output and delivery: "Why didn't you just ask Codex/Co-Pilot to do that?" is a question they now get frequently asked.

Conversely, a research data scientist reported a disconnect in delivery expectations. AI-accelerated output is outpacing what research SMEs colleagues not specialized in AI and data science can handle: "By telling them after half an hour, I'm done, I place a lot of pressure on them."

Even when it comes to human-to-human collaboration, AI seems to be both a bridge and a barrier.

While one software tester reported AI-driven automation reduced cross-team collaboration, a product manager experienced the opposite effect, as the ability to iterate more rapidly has actually led to more frequent check-ins with UX and engineering teams.

Across these diverse roles, employees agree on one theme: **AI integration into workflows, teams, organizational structures, and domains is simultaneously exciting and deeply stressful**. They all struggle to keep up with the constant technological changes and shifting stakeholder expectations.

HR shows inconsistencies across the board

We found similar idiosyncrasies in headcount and hiring share within the HR domain. The overall share of HR professionals in all hiring shrank by 25% (figure: Same team, opposite fates: Hiring trends are role-specific), but the share did not drop consistently over time. It first declined by 31% from the beginning of 2023 to the start of 2025, but then increased again by 9% starting in 2025 until May 2026.

> After a 31% decline through 2024, the share of HR hiring rebounded with a 9% increase since the start of 2025.

Same team, opposite fates: Hiring trends are role-specific



Source: Research & Insights, Visier Inc. 2026





Again, we see stark differences within the domain: while there was a 176% larger share of Employee & Labor Relations specialists hired within this domain, the share of Talent Management Specialists hired declined by 20%, while specialists in Talent Acquisition and Workforce Planning experienced decreases of 16% and 67%, respectively. Hiring of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion professionals has stopped entirely in the last month of our analysis.

> **Hiring of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion professionals has stopped in the last month of our analysis.**

These results suggest that, instead of focusing purely on the recruitment of new talent or building future workforce pipelines, companies are managing their current workforce, navigating compliance, and handling workplace conflict. While the total halt in DE&I hiring likely reflects changes that are unrelated to AI, they indicate a focus away from certain long-term culture initiatives that were important only a few years ago.

Overall, how AI transformation affects the HR domain serves as an opportunity for some teams to break through the barriers of administrative and mundane tasks, towards more strategic work.



EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

How AI workforce transformation affects the HR domain

One HR Director sees AI as augmentation, not replacement, but insists on keeping humans in the loop to verify outputs. For his team, it has collapsed project timelines from months to days. He also sees a structural reckoning ahead: as administrative tasks shrink, organizations need to proactively rethink HR roles, skills, and career paths.

> **"It's an opportunity to accelerate your career trajectory by really embracing the new tools, by being curious and pushing the envelope,"** he says.

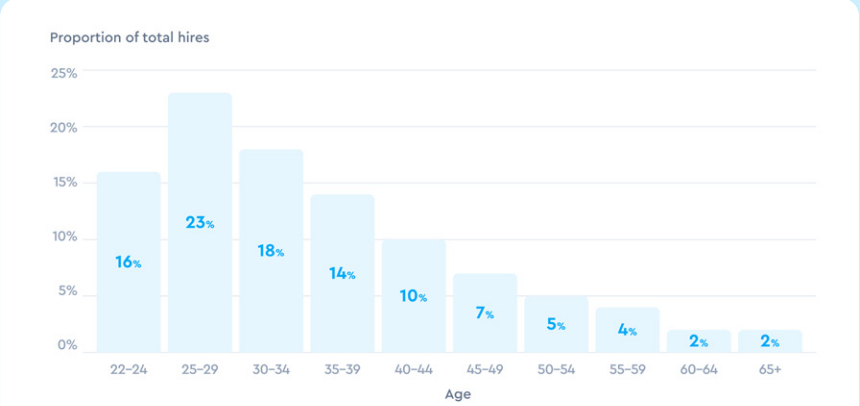
KEY FINDING #3

Organizations are increasingly prioritizing mid-career hires

Hiring rates declined by 24%, from 29% in 2022 to 22% in 2026. Young employees still make the largest share of new hires, but if current trends continue, employees aged 35 to 50 could soon make up the biggest group of new hires.

At the time of our last analysis in May 2026, employees aged 25–34 years old represented the largest share of hires overall, with hiring share declining steadily as age increases (figure: Young workers still lead in overall hiring).

Young workers lead in overall hiring

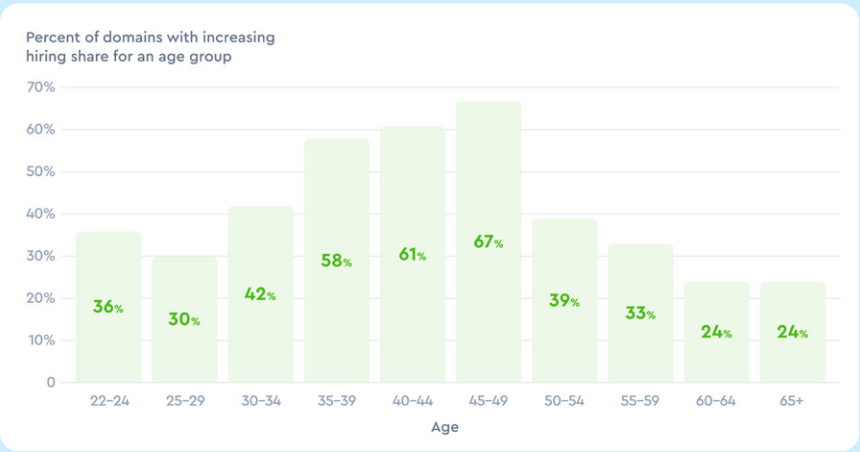


Source: Research & Insights, Visier Inc. 2026



However, when we broke hiring down by both age and domain, a surprising pattern emerged: more domains showed an increased share of hiring of 35-to 50-year-olds than of any other age group. In other words, the 35-to-50 age group is gaining ground in more domains than any other age band (figure: Organizations are increasingly prioritizing mid-career hires).

Organizations are increasingly prioritizing mid-career hires



Source: Research & Insights, Visier Inc. 2026

The generational differences we found in our hiring data point to shifting skill demands across employees' career lifecycle in a changing labor market. All of which is shadowed by the backdrop of AI.

A deeper look into hiring by age and across domains suggests that for younger, entry-level workers, hiring growth is concentrated in highly operational, execution-oriented, and service-driven roles like administration, customer service, and supply chain, where foundational organizational skills and immediate task execution are important.

Conversely, the growth in hiring for mid-career professionals spans highly specialized, strategic, and analytical domains such as software development, data analytics, HR, engineering, and product management. This suggests that organizations are looking for operational capabilities for their emerging talent while consolidating advanced technical expertise, domain expertise, and strategic management skills within their mature workforce.

Considering the declining hiring rates that dropped from 29% to 22% since 2022, these findings point to a rather selective hiring environment. Organizations seem to increasingly value employees' experience. Whether or not this reflects the impact of AI in reshaping entry-level work is not something our data can answer, but may be a question worth exploring further.





FOR CHROS AND PEOPLE LEADERS:

Context and Real-Time Data Matters in Workforce Transformation

HR teams are clearly under pressure. Even though 87% of business leaders mention Workforce & AI Strategy as most business-critical to their organizations,[13] just 5% of CHROs called their organizations very prepared' for an AI-enabled future of work.[14]

Part of the reason is structural: most HR data relies on annual planning cycles, static HRIS reports, and retrospective attrition metrics, which act as lagging indicators. They surface workforce shifts only after business reality has changed. This leaves HR reacting to AI transformation rather than navigating it.

> 87% of business leaders say AI workforce strategy is business-critical, yet just 5% of CHROs feel prepared. The reason isn't lack of effort—it's missing data.

Our data provides an inside look at the way the workforce is being reshaped from the inside out: AI affects the workforce in very different ways, depending on what they do, which domain they sit in, and in some cases, how experienced they are.

Our findings suggest that employees in some domains and subdomains have been gaining share, while others recede. And even within those same domains, hiring dynamics vary widely by subdomain, indicating that specific skills are being scaled up while others are phased out, even when the domain overall looks stable or growing.

Lastly, while hiring overall has slowed in the past four years, younger employees still make the largest share of new hires overall, but the proportion of mature professionals across domains has grown.

Rather than being a passive bystander relying on the lagging, domain-level view that most HR reporting still relies on, to become the driver of AI workforce transformation, we recommend CHROs:

Track domain and job changes in the business as they happen. Shifts in skills demands appear when the business restructures teams or hires new staff. Rather than wait for annual headcount reports to come out, tracking this data on-demand will help plan related HR processes more quickly and effectively.

Use these real-time signals to anticipate future hiring and upskilling needs. Based on live and in-the-moment insights about growing and retracting roles in the organization, HR can proactively plan and provide reskilling, internal mobility, or hiring support to the business.

Prioritize granular workforce insights. Because high-level metrics frequently mask detailed shifts, HR leaders must prioritize granular role data, including domain rankings, proportions, and adoption rates, to accurately monitor and detect organizational restructuring.

None of these shifts are visible from a single, aggregate number. They only become clear when the data is broken down by dimensions including domain, subdomain, and age, which is often not readily available.



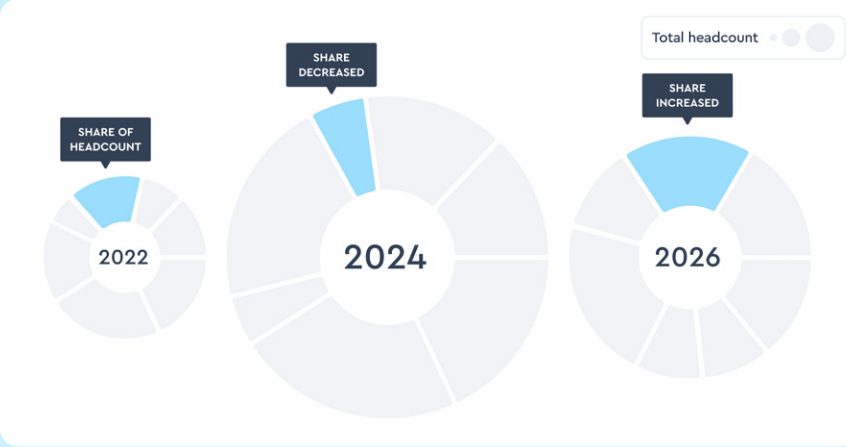
Research Method

To measure how the workforce has shifted across domains, we calculated each domain's headcount proportion: its headcount divided by total headcount in a given month. This shows the share of the entire workforce working in a given domain at any point in time. For example, if 500 of 10,000 employees work in Data & Analytics, this domain's headcount proportion is 5%. The same logic was applied to measure subdomain composition: the share of a domain's workforce belonging to a specific subdomain. For example, if the Data & Analytics domain has 500 employees and 100 of them work in Data Science, that subdomain accounts for 20% of the domain. This shows how each domain is composed internally, and which specializations dominate within it.

To track change over time, we measured each domain's headcount proportion percentage change, reflecting how much its share of the workforce grew or shrank over the analysis period between 2022 and 2026, ending in May of this year. For example, a value of +20% means the domain in May 2026 took up a 20% larger slice of the workforce than it did at the start of 2022.

It's important to note that these measures show a change in share or proportion, not in raw headcount, thereby, a domain can add employees and still shrink in proportion if the rest of the workforce grows faster (see figure: How do we measure headcount share?).

How do we measure headcount share?



Source: Research & Insights, Visier Inc. 2026

For hiring, instead of reporting each month's hiring share on its own, each month's value reflects all hiring activity from the previous 12 months combined. Monthly hiring numbers are noisy and show significant seasonal behavior. The trailing twelve-month (TTM) proportion smooths out these seasonal patterns, so the trend line shows the genuine underlying direction of hiring shifts rather than month-to-month spikes. Each monthly figure is a headcount-weighted mean so that larger companies count more toward the result, in proportion to their workforce size. The reported number reflects trends across the overall employee population rather than the average company.



Endnotes

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8. For a list of results for all domains we analyzed please refer to Appendix 1 in this report.
9. These values show percentage changes, which means we measure how much something has grown or shrunk relative to its starting value. A value of 39% means the domain now takes up a 39% larger slice of the workforce than it did at the beginning.
10. Our measure of "a hire" combines six start-event categories: Expansion External Starts, M&A Starts, Other External Starts, Other Starts, Replacement External Starts, and System Starts. Any time a person appears as joining an organization, regardless of the reason, it counts as a start event. These categories distinguish why someone joined: Expansion External Starts reflects people hired from outside the company to fill newly created positions (growth-driven hiring), Replacement External Starts reflects people hired from outside to backfill a position someone else left (turnover-driven, not growth), and M&A Starts reflects employees who joined through a merger or acquisition rather than a traditional hiring process.
11. The hiring share in January 2023 is a trailing 12-month metric and uses all hires from February 2022 to January 2023 to determine shares to account for seasonality.
12. To illustrate the scale of the shift for the subdomain of the AI Engineer role consider this hypothetical example: If at the beginning of the reporting period, AI Engineers represented 2 % of the total headcount. and the role experienced a 251% growth rate, the proportion of AI Engineers would now account for 7% of the total workforce.
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Contributors



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Andrea is the Principal of Research and Value at Visier. Her background in management research, neuroscience, and human capital consulting helps her produce data-based, practice-oriented, and actionable insights for business and HR leaders.



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Erfaneh is a Data Scientist Intern at Visier, developing HR analytics reports and transforming data into actionable insights for workforce optimization. She has a background in deep learning research and graph neural networks and is passionate about using data science to help organizations make better decisions.



Dani Haig
User Experience Designer

Dani is a User Experience Designer at Visier, specializing in designing intuitive and beautiful software that empowers users to get work done. Dani has designed a variety of experiences across the Visier platform and is passionate about the rich stories that can be told with data.

About our data

The findings as presented in this report are curated from the Visier Community Data. Visier's database contains more than 18 million employee records from more than 10,000 customers in 75 countries.

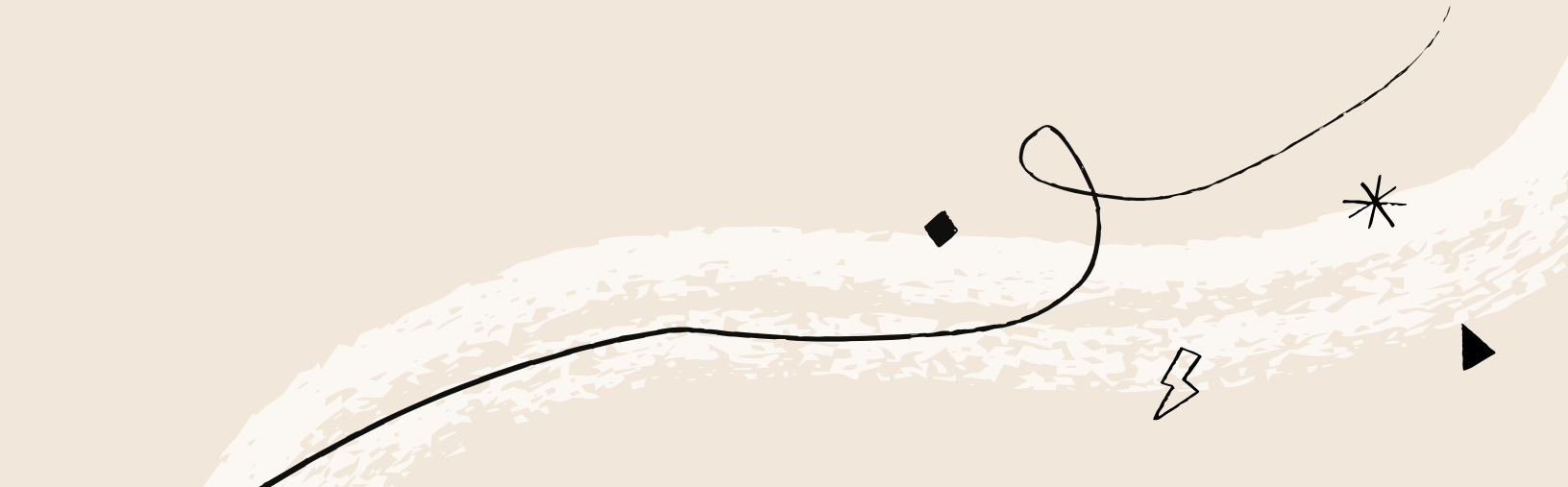
For the analyses in this report, we used available data from a subpopulation of over 155 enterprise-sized organizations, with a collective headcount of more than 3.6 million global employee records. Companies in this study represent a wide range of industries, including Healthcare (6%), Technology (24%), Financial Services and Insurance (26%), Manufacturing (30%), Retail, Wholesale, Transportation, and Warehousing (6%).

Weighted averages account for different headcounts per each organization. For each of the included companies, Visier ensured a high degree of confidence in both data availability and quality for the topics and time period being covered by this report.

About Visier

Visier Workforce AI is the context foundation for talent management. The Visier Workforce Intelligence Platform turns scattered, sensitive people data into one governed understanding of the entire workforce, so organizations can understand, plan, and activate all of their talent priorities in one place. More than 85,000 of the world's most complex organizations, including Ford Motor Company, eBay, Experian, and Domino's Pizza, rely on Visier's over 16 years of workforce domain expertise, ranked #1 in vendor satisfaction and user experience for three consecutive years by the Sapient Insights HR Systems Survey.

Learn more at Visier visier.com.



Appendix

Domains with increasing headcount proportion

Compared to their hiring proportions

DOMAIN	HEADCOUNT	HIRING
Data & Analytics Professionals	+ 49%	+ 48%
Product Management Professionals	+ 39%	- 6%
Architectural & Design Professionals	+ 36%	+ 39%
Educators & Trainers	+ 26%	+ 26%
Communications Workers	+ 24%	- 24%
Quality & Technical Assurance Workers	+ 18%	- 6%
Executives & Business Leaders	+ 17%	+ 26%
IT Infrastructure & Systems Workers	+ 15%	+ 3%
Marketing Professionals	+ 15%	+ 3%
Protective Services Workers	+ 11%	+ 63%
Legal Professionals	+ 9%	+ 12%
Engineering Professionals	+ 8%	+ 20%
Sales Workers	+ 7%	+ 31%

Source: Research & Insights, Visier Inc. 2026

Domains with decreasing headcount proportion

Compared to their hiring proportions

DOMAIN	HEADCOUNT	HIRING
Administrative Support Workers	- 1%	+ 11%
Project Management Professionals	- 3%	- 17%
HR Professionals	- 3%	- 25%
Financial Professionals	- 4%	- 13%
Transportation Workers	- 5%	+ 38%
Technical Tradespeople & Production Workers	- 8%	- 23%
Client, Customer, Patient, & Similar Services Workers	- 14%	+ 19%
Creative Arts & Creative Production Workers	- 17%	- 22%
Business Strategy & Analysis Professionals	- 20%	- 20%
Healthcare Providers	- 25%	- 6%
Fundraising & Grants Professionals	- 29%	- 30%

Source: Research & Insights, Visier Inc. 2026

Domains with no significant change in headcount proportion

Compared to their hiring proportions

DOMAIN	HEADCOUNT	HIRING
Scientific Researchers & Research Support Workers	+ 5%	- 18%
Supply Chain Workers Excluding Transportation	+ 3%	+ 10%
Software & Application Developers	+ 2%	+ 7%
Risk Analysis & Compliance Professionals	+ 1%	- 24%
Facilities, Property Management, & Related Services Workers	+ 1%	+ 32%
Knowledge, Information, & Records Management Professionals	0%	- 29%

Source: Research & Insights, Visier Inc. 2026



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