2026

H3 HR ADVISORS

THE INTELLIGENT WORKPLACE

How AI Is Reshaping Work and Leadership

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Meet Our Team

TRISH STEED CO-FOUNDER AND CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER

Trish Steed is the CEO and Chief Strategist for H3 HR Advisors, and co-host of the At Work in America podcast on the HR Happy Hour Network alongside Steve Boese. She is also the creator of the H3 LIVE! vlog.

A former HR executive and HCM product leader with over 20 years of experience in Big 4 public accounting, PR, healthcare, manufacturing, and IT, Trish brings that knowledge to her clients as an analyst and advisor.

STEVE BOESE CO-FOUNDER AND CHIEF DATA OFFICER

Steve is one of the Co-Founders of H3 HR Advisors, a leading HR technology advisory and services consultancy.

Since 2013, Steve has been the Program Chair and host of the HR Technology Conference, the world's largest gathering of the global HR Technology community, and authors a monthly HR Technology Column for Human Resource Executive magazine. He is a frequent speaker and author on topics in Human Resources, HR technology, and the world of work.

KAREN STEED DIRECTOR, CLIENT EXPERIENCE

Karen Steed is the Client Experience Director & Learning Analyst for H3 HR Advisors. She works with client teams to promote their organizational needs seamlessly and effectively, through strategy and planning. She is also responsible for the HR Happy Hour Network media production and promotion. Previously, Karen served 15 years as an elementary educator and early childhood administrator. Her focus is on learning solutions that are engaging and practical.

CARLEIGH MCFARLANE PR AND MARKETING ASSOCIATE

Carleigh is a PR and Marketing Associate and Producer at H3 HR Advisors, where she drives strategic brand growth through research-backed content and high-quality podcast production. A graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a degree in Journalism and Mass Communications, Carleigh leverages a deep background in data journalism and strategic storytelling. Her experience includes reporting on emerging technologies at international conferences and producing multi-platform content that resonates with global audiences.

Introduction

The first half of 2026 will likely be remembered as the moment artificial intelligence stopped being an emerging technology and became an organizational imperative. Across nearly every industry, AI moved beyond experimentation and into enterprise workflows. But looking back over the past six months, we don't believe AI was actually the biggest story.

The bigger story was that organizations began redesigning themselves around AI.

That shift has implications far beyond technology. It is changing workforce strategy, organizational design, leadership, employee expectations, and the role of Human Resources itself. Looking back across six months of Workplace Minute episodes, as well as our other HR Happy Hour Media Network shows, and the hundreds of news stories and research reports we've analyzed; six themes stand out. Together, they tell us far more about where work is heading than any individual headline ever could.

There are plenty of places to find headlines. The greater challenge for leaders is understanding which headlines represent lasting change and which simply reflect the news cycle. And ultimately, their challenge is how to respond to changes in technology, culture, the economy, and society.

During the first half of 2026, we explored topics ranging from AI infrastructure and labor market shifts to worker trust, financial wellbeing, organizational redesign, age inclusion, skilled trades, and the changing relationship between employers and employees. At first glance these may appear to be unrelated stories.
They aren't.

Viewed together, they reveal an important pattern. Organizations are no longer simply adopting new technology. They are making fundamental decisions about how work itself will be organized during the AI era.

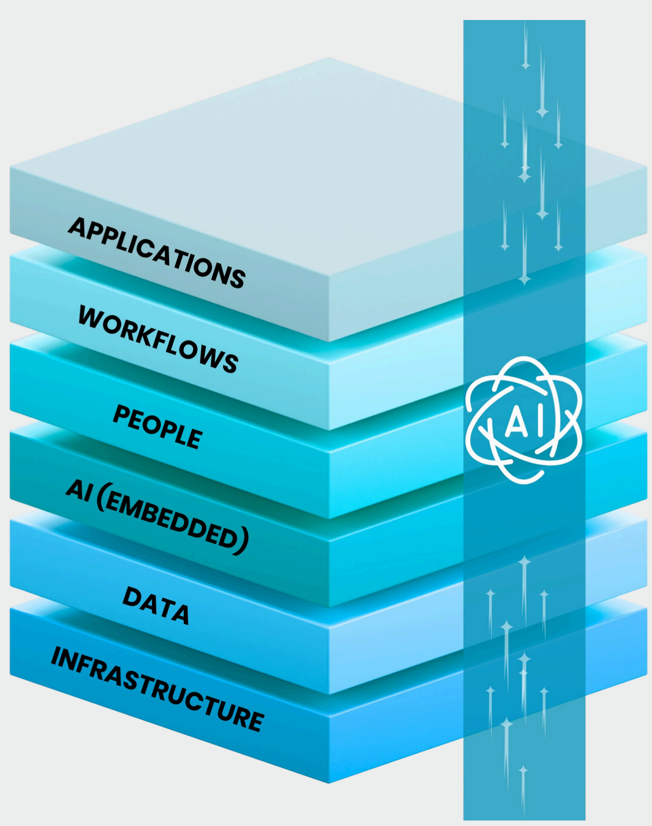
Six Defining Shifts

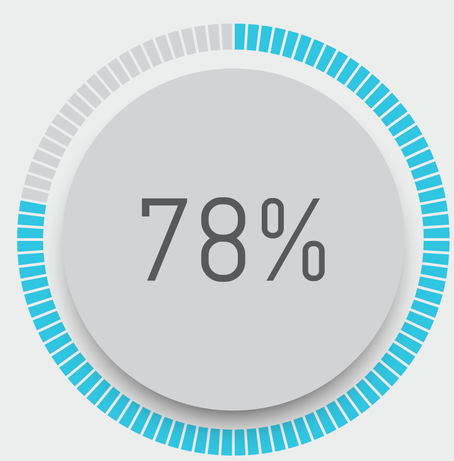
AI Stopped Being a Technology Project

The biggest technology story of this year so far wasn't the release of another model or another chatbot. It was the realization that AI had become embedded in enterprise infrastructure.

Throughout the year on The Workplace Minute, we've examined billion-dollar investments in AI infrastructure, the rapid expansion of data centers, Oracle's vision for embedded enterprise AI, the emergence of Model Context Protocol, growing enterprise demand for agentic AI, and the skilled trades workforce required to build the physical infrastructure supporting this new economy.

Taken together, these developments tell a consistent story. AI is no longer an innovation project owned by IT. AI is becoming part of the operating model of the enterprise itself. That changes the conversation entirely. The question is no longer whether organizations should adopt AI. The question is how they redesign themselves around it.





of HR leaders say AI is critical to their organization's future strategy

Source: 2026 H3 HR Advisor's Trends Report

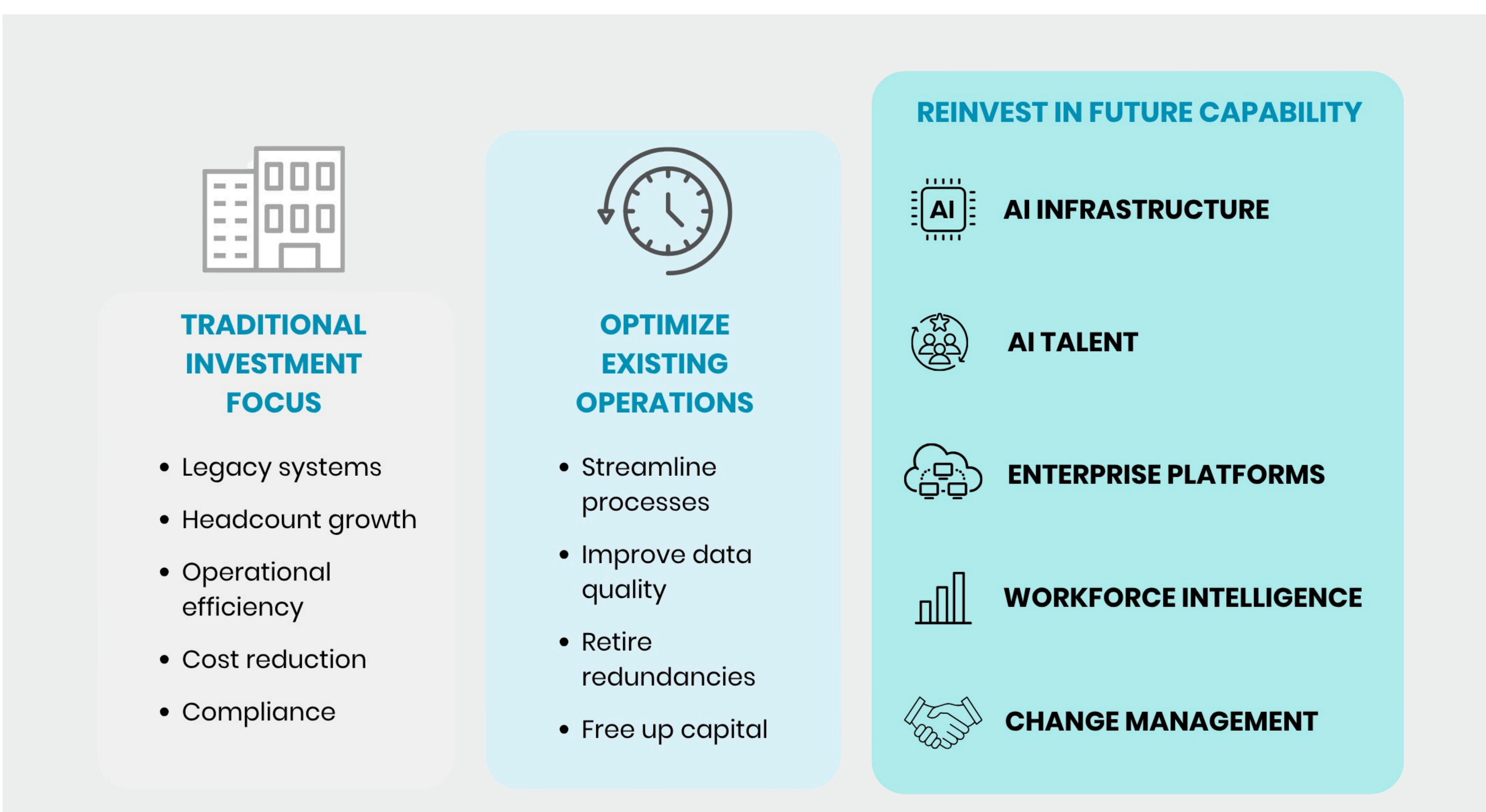
Organizations Began Reallocating Investment

One of the more revealing trends this year wasn't simply increasing AI spending. It was where organizations found the money to fund those growing investments.

Earlier this year we discussed Teradata's decision to redirect compensation dollars toward AI investments. We examined companies pausing traditional workforce investments while increasing spending on technology and specialized AI talent. We also explored comments from executives who openly acknowledged that AI had become the organization's highest strategic investment priority.

These examples illustrate a broader shift in capital allocation. Organizations increasingly view AI as essential to future competitiveness. The challenge now is ensuring those investments strengthen, rather than weaken, employee confidence.

Technology creates capability but people create competitive advantage. The organizations that understand the difference will be the ones that outperform over the long term.



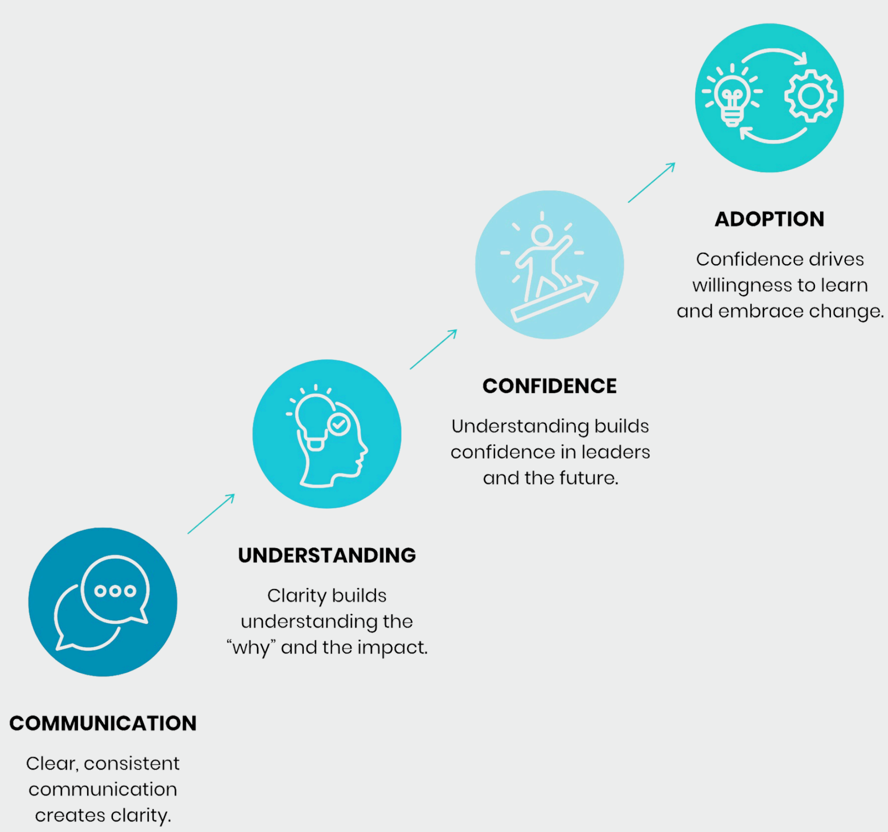
Worker Confidence Became a Business Metric

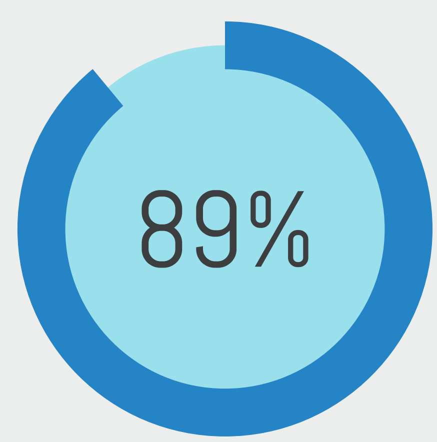
Perhaps the most underappreciated story of the first half of 2026 wasn't technological at all. It was psychological.

Throughout the year we discussed AI anxiety, slowing hiring, job search burnout, unemployment benefits, financial wellbeing, declining worker confidence, and the uncertainty many employees feel about their future careers. We also devoted a three-part Workplace Minute series to exploring how organizations can build trust during periods of rapid technological change.

Looking back, these weren't separate conversations. They were different expressions of the same challenge.

Workers generally understand that change is inevitable. What they struggle with is uncertainty. When organizations clearly explain how technology creates opportunity, employees become far more willing to embrace change. When communication is absent, uncertainty fills the gap.





HR leaders expect AI to impact jobs in 2026

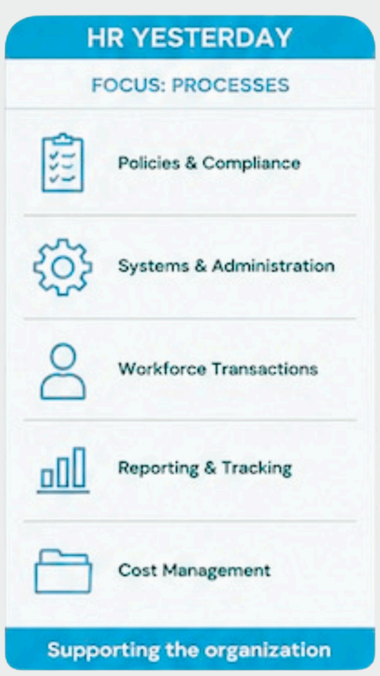
Source: CNBC Workforce Executive Council

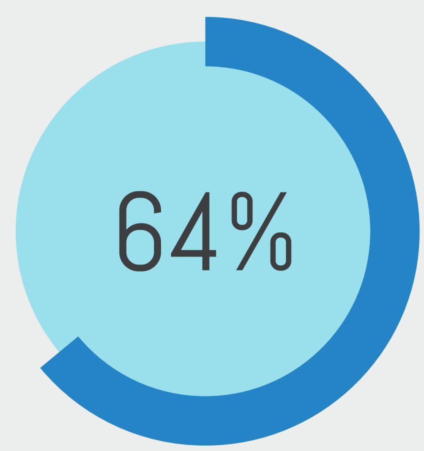
HR's Job Description Changed

For years, HR technology conversations centered on systems, automation, and efficiency. That is changing.

Increasingly, HR leaders are being asked to redesign work itself.

We've discussed workforce operating systems, agentic AI, digital coworkers, enterprise platforms, organizational redesign, and the changing relationship between humans and intelligent systems. These conversations all point toward a broader evolution of the HR function. Tomorrow's HR leaders won't simply implement technology. They will help redesign organizations. That may become one of the profession's most important responsibilities during the coming decade.





of HR professionals already use AI tools in their daily work

Source: 2026 H3 HR Advisor's Trends Report

Trust Emerged as the Currency of AI Adoption

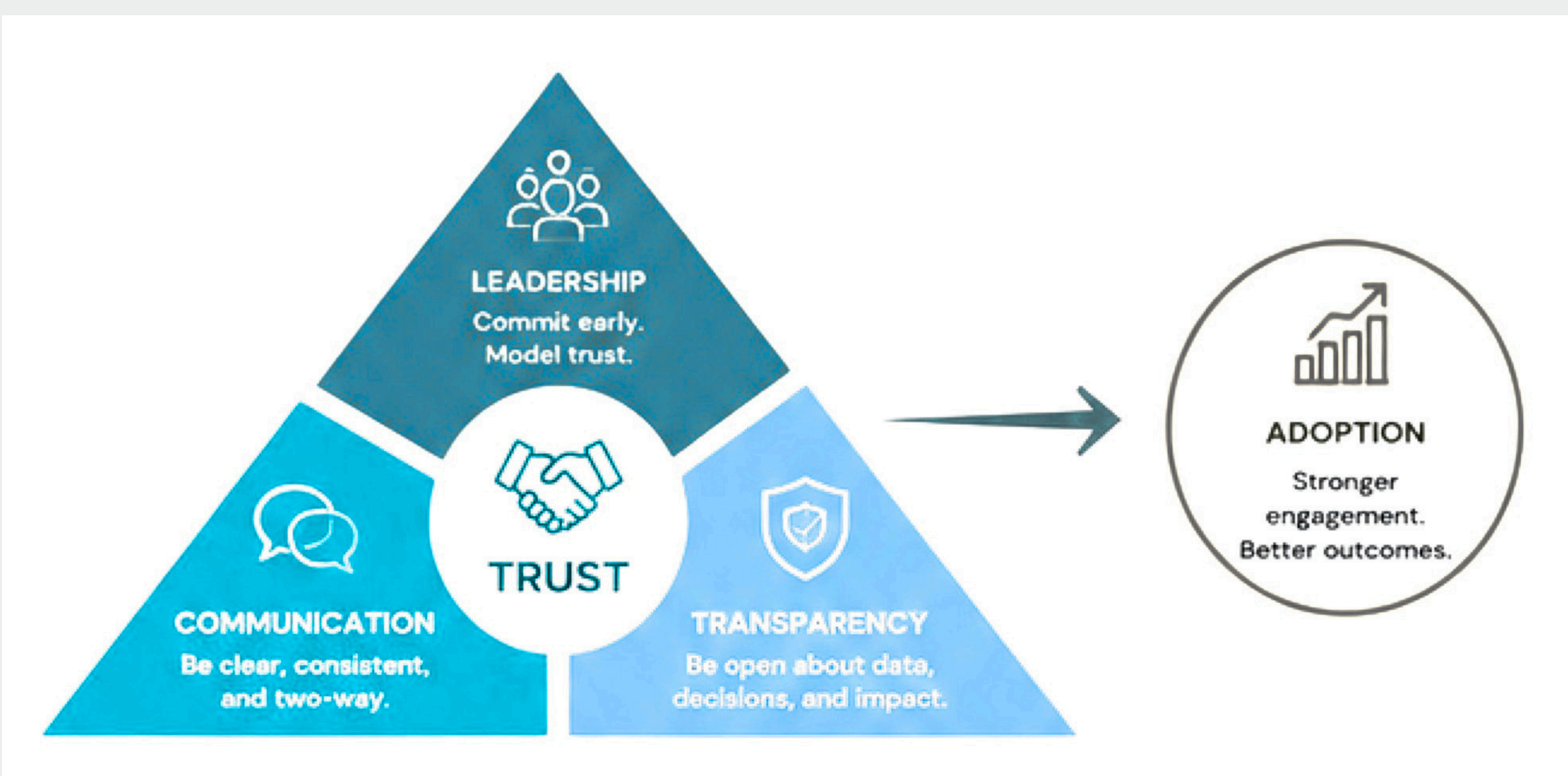
If there has been one recurring theme throughout our HR Happy Hour Media Network content this year, it has been trust.

Whether discussing layoffs, AI implementation, Pride Month, age inclusion, worker safety, financial wellbeing, or our recent conversation about the American Dream at Work, one question consistently surfaced:

Do workers believe their organizations are creating opportunity, or simply demanding adoption?

This distinction matters because technology adoption ultimately depends on trust.

Employees who trust leadership are more willing to learn, experiment, and embrace new ways of working. Employees who lack trust often resist change, not because they oppose technology, but because they are uncertain about what it means for them.



Opportunity Became the New Measure of Leadership

As we reflected on the first half of the year, one final theme stood above the others. Opportunity.

Our recent Independence Day Workplace Minute episode explored the idea that the future of work should ultimately be measured by whether organizations continue expanding opportunity for people. Looking back across the year's conversations, I believe that idea connects nearly everything we've discussed.

Organizations investing in AI have an opportunity to create better work. Organizations redesigning jobs have an opportunity to make careers more meaningful. Organizations embracing new technologies have an opportunity to make those technologies accessible to more people. Leadership in the AI era will increasingly be judged not simply by financial performance or productivity gains, but by whether organizations continue creating opportunity for employees to learn, contribute, grow, and succeed.

That may become the defining leadership challenge of the next decade.

Three Questions for the Second Half of 2026

First, which organizations will redesign work instead of simply automating it?

Adding AI to existing processes may improve efficiency. Redesigning work around the strengths of both people and technology has the potential to fundamentally improve organizational performance.

Second, which organizations will continue investing in people while investing aggressively in AI?

The companies that successfully balance technological innovation with human development may establish a durable competitive advantage that extends well beyond the AI cycle itself.

Third, which organizations will earn employee confidence instead of simply asking for it?

Trust cannot be mandated. It must be built through transparency, communication, fairness, and visible investment in people.

The Bigger Story

Every leadership team is making decisions about what kind of company it wants to become. AI is accelerating those decisions, but it isn't making them.

The second half of the year won't be remembered because AI models became faster or more capable. It will be remembered because organizations began demonstrating what they truly value. The future of work has never been solely about technology. It has always been about leadership.

And leadership is ultimately measured by the choices we make about people.

Partner with us in 2026

H3 HR Advisors is a full-service Human Capital Management consulting, research, and advisory firm. Additional packages or retainer options available.

Launched in 2009, The HR Happy Hour Media Network features the longest continuously running internet radio show and podcast on all things HR and HCM.

Succeed by building relationships that drive your ambitious business results forward with experience and insights you can trust

- HR and learning leaders bringing our combined 70+ years of experience to your project
- Providing an objective look at your solution and marketing needs
- Helping you reach your product and customer goals
- Utilizing our company research to support your business imperatives
- Thought leadership to understand the evolving workplace
- Projects tailored specifically to your needs

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