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TH EDITION
OF THE REPORT

house of skills 

TRENDS IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

2026



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Introduction

Michał Zaborek

CEO House of Skills

We live in a rapidly changing, unpredictable and not fully understood world. The sense of chaos that many of us feel is exacerbated by accelerating technological change, which is reorganising entire industries – and we hear from all sides that this is „only the beginning”. The AI arms race is underway, although there are growing voices saying that the only certainties in this race are expenditure and investment in computing power (infrastructure, buildings and IT hardware). However, compared to the costs incurred, the effects are not only unspectacular, but will only come sometime in the future – and it is not entirely clear when.

The data indicates that the state of the world and our economy is not as bad as we hear every day. However, it is difficult to escape the numerous concerns, both real and potential. The growing contradictions are reflected, among other things, in the leadership crisis, i.e. the „great fatigue and alienation” of leaders who are struggling with challenges at the systemic (organisation), relational (leader-team) and individual (the leader themselves). We write about this extensively in this publication. We also analyse the state of the labour market, the condition of well-being, changes in the approach to development, and the quality and effectiveness of access to content. We look at the impact of artificial intelligence on the situation of companies and their organisational culture.

We present the latest edition of the report Trends in Human Development in Organisations by House of Skills and e-learning.pl, devoted to what lies „just around the corner” in the world of development in the near future. The publication is based on an analysis of reports, research results, conclusions from conferences and, above all, hundreds of projects carried out with our clients in Poland and abroad.

This year, we also sought the opinions of our licensing partners – global know-how companies with whom we cooperate in the area of providing high-quality development services tailored to the specifics of Polish national culture. We invite you to read it!

The report was written by human experts, while the translation was produced with the support of AI.



trend #1

Michał Zaborek

Where is the labour **market heading?**

Where is the labour market heading?

We begin our analysis of trends by looking at the state of the domestic labour market – how it currently looks and what changes we can expect in the near future.

For years, Poland has been experiencing an employee's market. This conventional term describes a situation in which there is a labour shortage in a significant part of the labour market, and the bargaining position and sense of power are shifting towards job seekers, i.e. employees. This situation has been going on since around 2016 (although it is impossible to pinpoint a single moment), but it was then that unemployment began to fall significantly¹. Many publications from 2017 already mentioned a clear shortage of labour. Let us take a brief look at other phenomena that accompanied this.

- **Wage growth.** In November 2015, the average gross salary was PLN 4,164. In November 2020, it was PLN 5,533, and in 2025 it will be PLN 9,121. This is an increase of about 65% over the last five years. This increases the wealth of society, as the increase outpaces inflation, but it also poses a major challenge to business models based on human labour. In most industries, this phenomenon should be accompanied by a flattening of wage differences in similar positions – salaries are becoming more similar to each other. In the near future, this will also be influenced by the Pay Transparency Directive.
- **The influx of economic migrants to Poland** – of whom we have more than 10 times as many today as a decade ago. The vast majority of them are Ukrainians who are feeding the labour market and actively strengthening the economy's ability to generate small but clear and stable growth, both on the labour supply and consumption sides². Interestingly, our companies are more courageous in this area than their Western neighbours. While less than 9% of small and medium-sized companies in the European Union look for staff outside Europe, in Poland this is already the case for every eighth company – 13.3%³.
- **The growing importance of non-wage benefits.** Progress in this area is enormous, and we describe this phenomenon in the trend concerning *well-being*. A huge market has emerged in our country for companies offering various products and services designed to increase the attractiveness of workplaces.
- **The lowering of the retirement age** in 2017 reduced the availability of people on the labour market and increased pressure on employers. In view of the clearly negative demographic

¹ According to the Central Statistical Office, registered unemployment in November was: 2013 – 13.2%, 2014 – 11.4%, 2015 – 9.6%, 2016 – 8.2%, 2017 – 6.5%, 2018 – 5.7%. For 2025, it was 5.6%.

² In 2025, over 1.1 million foreigners were working in Poland, of which over 700,000 were Ukrainian citizens (GUS data).

³ Eurofound, Living and Working in Europe, 2024, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/all/living-and-working-europe-2024>.

data (we wrote about this extensively a year ago) and the lengthening life cycle and health of Polish women and men, this was an economically irrational move.

In the near future, we can expect a decline in the number of people working in our economy. In recent years, this number has fluctuated around 15-16 million⁴. Its size will be influenced by many factors, the strongest of which, unfortunately negative, will be demographics. It is difficult to expect an increase in the number of people participating in the labour market with a steadily declining population – every month, a city with a population of around 13,000 symbolically “disappears” from the map of Poland. Migration dynamics are unlikely to fill this gap. A scenario in which fewer people enter the labour market will pose a major challenge and barrier to growth, unless we introduce effective automation, which will not be possible everywhere. This will also have a significant impact on the number of consumers and the size of markets – on the demand side.

The last decade has seen the emergence and strengthening of a number of phenomena that we now consider standard and normal, but which 5-10 years ago were merely a curiosity or a novelty. These include frequent job changes, increased geographical mobility (which has been supported by the pandemic), pressure to change and upgrade the qualifications (reskilling) of those already employed, a flood of new companies in the recruitment area – including numerous specialist agencies supporting the search for people to work or bringing in employees from abroad, or companies offering all kinds of well-being services and non-wage benefits.

Another significant change is a more serious and strategic approach to development activities – both by companies and labour market participants. In the face of changes that seem to be only accelerating, organisations, experts and managers alike are taking a much more practical and serious approach to developing their skills and attitudes towards reality. Development has come a long way since the early 1990s and is now an essential part of competing in virtually every industry. We predict that this will not change and that the emphasis will be on achieving rapid and direct business results through development activities.

However, we have a lot of catching up to do when it comes to investing in people. While in Europe an average of 7 out of 10 companies provide training for their teams, in Poland only 41% do so. This is a dangerous gap, especially in a situation of rapid technological change⁵. According to the World Economic Forum 2025 report, employees must expect that

⁴ The data varies depending on the source; GUS calculates it differently than Eurostat, for example, and also makes significant adjustments to its methodology. For current values, please refer to the GUS and Eurostat websites.

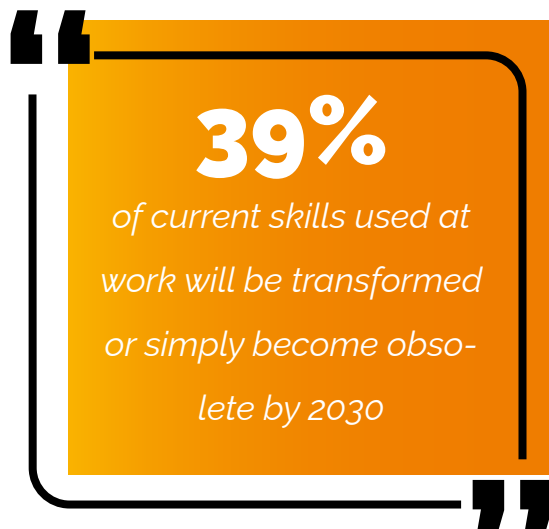
⁵ Eurofound, Living and Working in Europe, 2024.

between 2025 and 2030, an average of 39% of their current skills will be transformed or simply become obsolete. Technology is “running away” because it is changing the way work is done faster than standard education systems or internal implementation programmes in companies are able to respond.

At the start of 2026, we are seeing a clear increase in pressure on the effectiveness of all activities undertaken by organisations. After years of post-pandemic recovery, the pendulum of attention is swinging towards hard data, results and outcomes. We see the main reason for this in falling margins in some areas of the economy, which is often felt with a delay as a consequence of a series of changes and, above all, high inflation in recent years. The costs of energy, labour, raw materials and components have risen significantly. Supply chains have been disrupted, and it is not always possible to restore them to their previous state. We are facing unprecedented economic and political turmoil and greater uncertainty about the future than in previous years, fuelled by technological change. Artificial intelligence, which is most often discussed in the popular media in the context of its use in white-collar work, may have a much deeper, faster and more long-term impact on areas such as industry, materials science, IT and the medical sector than on office work. However, this process is arousing extreme emotions. According to the Ipsos AI Monitor 2025 report, the level of anxiety associated with AI in Poland is one of the lowest in the region⁶. At the same time, employees are beginning to understand that the ability to prompt will soon become as common a standard as Excel or Word once were – it will mark the boundary between new efficiency and stagnation.

These changes are still ahead of us, but they are likely to reshape and further transform the global competitive landscape in the near future. Just look at the fundamental challenges facing the German economy, our main trading partner, especially the automotive and heavy industries.

There is no indication that these changes will slow down in the coming years. So what will the labour market look like in the near future? Unless there are completely unpredictable



⁶ The reason for this is one of the highest levels of uncertainty avoidance in the world – the so-called UAI, which for Poland is 93/100. More information can be found at: <https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=poland>. As a nation, we have a fear of our surroundings and the future “built into” our DNA.

events of tectonic magnitude, such as a war between Russia and NATO⁷ or deep economic crises, we do not foresee a widespread return of the employer's market across the entire economy, at least not in its current form. However, this may happen in individual industries. As a reminder, we talk about an employer's market when unemployment is relatively high, there are few vacancies, and organisations that employ people have contractual "power and authority". Typical phenomena in such a market include:

- a decline in people's willingness to change jobs, which in turn leads to a slowdown in innovation and knowledge transfer between companies;
- a slowdown in wage growth – due to the bargaining power of employers;
- a possible decline in investment in development – competition for employees decreases, and some companies assume that "it is better to hire than to train", i.e. to buy ready-made skills on the market;
- employers' requirements and expectations of candidates are increasing – recruitment processes are becoming longer and more people on the labour market are remaining in jobs that do not match their preferences and/or qualifications;
- Tensions among employees are intensifying and there is a growing sense of uncertainty, which has a negative impact on the mental health of society due to uncertainty in the labour market.

A market that has been dominated by employers for years is becoming less attractive to the best employees, talents and managers. In the long term, the pendulum swings back and forth, with the last decade in Poland clearly indicating an employee's market, which is related to the long and steady period of economic growth in our country.

So where are we headed?

At the beginning of 2026, however, we are seeing a number of signs indicating that in some industries we can talk not so much about the end of the employee's market as about a cooling of the current situation. The unemployment rate at the end of 2025 was 5.6% – which is low. In November 2025, the number of unemployed was about 100,000 higher than a year ago⁸, and employment in Poland amounted to 6,413,800 jobs, which was 0.8% lower than a year ago. A number of industries are opting for so-called silent restructuring, which means that new employees are not replacing those who are leaving, and the number of jobs is slowly and

⁷ In itself, as long as it does not directly affect Poland, war does not necessarily have a negative impact on our economy, as history has shown many times.

⁸ According to Eurostat methodology, Poland has the second lowest unemployment rate in the European Union (3.2%), behind Malta.

naturally decreasing. This process is sometimes supported by the automation of specific areas of an organisation's operations and the replacement of human labour with processes and algorithms, but this is by no means something that happens automatically. Often, we are simply dealing with a reduction in the number of jobs, which can have a number of negative consequences for those who remain in a given position (the same work being done by fewer people). However, the model of "doing more with less" has its limits, and it seems that in many industries, the Polish market is reaching them.

According to Eurofound data (2024), Poland is among the countries in the region with the highest risk of burnout. If silent restructuring is not linked to real process changes, automation and support for the mental resilience of employees, the gains from job savings will quickly be consumed by the costs of absenteeism and a drastic drop in productivity among those who remain.

Regardless of this, we are facing a decline in the number of talented individuals on the labour market due to the ongoing demographic crisis.

The statistics are relentless: as many as 8 out of 10 companies in Poland (80.4%) declare that finding an employee with the right skills is a huge challenge today. This result is identical to the EU average, which shows that we are playing in the same league of problems as the rest of Europe⁹. Fewer and fewer people are entering the labour market, and with the current age structure and the current (low) retirement age, this means that there are fewer high-quality employees available. The demand for them will not decrease, as the economy is growing and is (fortunately) very diverse, with many strong industries. Due to demographic factors, we will see a growing trend of employing older people (those who will not want to or will not be able to retire due to low benefits). This means an increasingly diverse labour market, with a multitude of needs, working models and cooperation with the actors present on it.

In June 2025, regulations came into force concerning the granting of the so-called EU Blue Card, which is intended to facilitate the employment of foreigners in Poland. This is a step in the right direction, but it is insufficient because it only covers a narrow group of companies and professions¹⁰. On a national scale, we still need a conscious migration strategy that attracts



Today, for over
80%
*of companies, finding an
employee with the right skills
is a huge challenge.*

⁹ Eurofound, Living and Working in Europe, 2024.

¹⁰ The Lewiatan Confederation points to the need to build a so-called fast track for foreign workers, modelled on solutions in place in Finland and the Netherlands, for example, in order to make it easier to recruit highly qualified workers.

suitable workers from abroad who are ready to assimilate into the working and employment conditions on the Polish market, ready not only to perform the simplest and lowest-paid jobs, but also to build the future strength of our economy. This means an increase in diversity and awareness of cultural differences – it is also a highly sensitive political issue, but we cannot escape it due to demographics. We predict that the labour market will become increasingly open to foreign workers, and the law, slowly but surely, will catch up with reality and the real needs of the market.

Diversity will therefore increase. In the coming years, we anticipate a further increase in the importance of women and female leadership in the market. In our country, 23% of company executives are women, which places us at the bottom of the EU countries. Despite the recent global retreat from these issues¹¹, we predict that equality issues, at least in Europe, will remain extremely important and will have a positive impact on business. We believe that this will also be the case in Poland, especially since our labour market still has a lot of catching up to do, due to the legacy of paternalistic management styles and the large power distance in the national culture, which reinforce traditional and not fully effective models of work and management. We therefore anticipate a continued positive impact of diversity on business in our labour market.

We believe that, mainly due to competitive pressure exerted not only by Western Europe and the US, but also by countries in Asia (China, India) and other regions, the concept of a 4-day working week will be put on the back burner, at least for now. The response to the numerous and clearly audible voices saying that the European economy is already far less competitive than the economies of other regions will not be to reduce working hours – in most industries, this would simply not pay off. This does not mean that the topic will be completely abandoned, but it will continue to be more of an experiment and a curiosity than a mainstream issue.

Artificial intelligence will change many industries, although there is little evidence today that the widespread use of AI tools will result in the destructive force of this trend, leading to mass redundancies, as was predicted a few years ago. Even in industries that are seemingly vulnerable to the effects of AI, such as IT and medicine, what is happening is rather optimisation and a return to normality. AI will also change the landscape of the labour market – we predict a clear division between super-efficient employees and managers and those whose pace, quality and results remain average. The same will be true at the organisational level – some organisations will leap ahead if they effectively change the way they operate thanks to the

¹¹ The Donald Trump administration in the US, which has changed its approach to DEI, plays a key role here. The largest big-tech companies and others are obediently following its lead, but of course not all of them, which only shows who took equality issues seriously and who treated them as a facade.

capabilities of artificial intelligence. Nevertheless, many experts and analysts are predicting a major correction in the AI market. The question of the legitimacy of the funds invested in relation to the benefits is becoming relevant.

Two factors will begin to play a key role in choosing an employer: flexibility in terms of how work is performed and company culture. The pandemic has changed our relationship with work. People who can work remotely have gained the opportunity to redefine their work-life balance. Organisations take different approaches to working models, just as individuals have different preferences. For white-collar workers, this means a labour market where there is no going back to how things were before 2020. Despite the digital revolution, we are still traditionalists. Over 40%¹² of employees in positions that technically allow them to work from home have never taken advantage of this option. This shows that the barrier lies not in the equipment, but in management culture and habits.

The willingness of employers to offer different models of work in parallel is therefore becoming one of the main elements of mutual adjustment in relations with employees. This trend is likely to intensify in the coming years.

So what will the future of the labour market look like?

It will certainly not be one of calm and stagnation – too many elements of everyday life are undergoing fundamental change right now. We anticipate a gradual, quiet restructuring of employment in many industries, while maintaining the vast majority of the characteristics of an employee's market and keeping the unemployment rate relatively low. We do not believe that we are heading towards an employer's market – too many important variables are working against this (including demographics, economic growth and demand for talent). However, we may see a slowdown in some phenomena typical of an employee's market, such as a significant reduction in wage growth, which will not increase as rapidly as in recent years. In some industries, global factors (geopolitics, AI, labour costs) have a strong impact on us – this may result in a shift towards an employer's market. One such industry in the near future may be shared service centres, where labour costs and advancing automation are becoming extremely important issues. Another industry at risk is the automotive industry, including its ecosystem of subcontractors.

Work itself has been undergoing rapid change for years. Although we feel an understandable need for stability and job security, there is a process of work fragmentation and the implementation of *the gig economy*. This means, among other things, a shift away

¹² Eurofound, Living and Working in Europe, 2024.

from permanent jobs in favour of working for several companies at once and offering project-based cooperation, including to highly qualified specialists who will be employed, for example, 2-3 days a week. Due to increasingly fierce competition, including international competition, it will be difficult to reconcile the desire for security, stability and predictability with the realities and challenges of today's world¹³.

Decisions on spending funds on development will take on a strategic character within the organisation, which stems from the need to keep up with reality. There will be a marked increase in awareness and the role of formal qualifications, where quality will be more important than the number of courses and training programmes completed. We are not necessarily referring to university degrees and many years of study – both in our country and around the world, there is a shift away from mass formal education, and this trend is unlikely to change. Pressure on productivity and business efficiency will continue, reinforced, as always, by change today and uncertainty about what tomorrow will bring. In an era of quiet employment restructuring, the key to retaining talent will be not only wages, but also the quality of management and leadership. We discuss the challenges in these areas in the second trend.

¹³ Current protectionist trends in the global economy only confirm the challenges posed by increasing global competition.



trend #2

Dariusz Chełmiński

Leadership crisis

Leadership crisis. Great fatigue and great distance¹⁴

This article quotes statements made by managers participating in our projects. They represent prosperous companies.

Context

A world on the brink of chaos

The leadership crisis does not exist in a vacuum, but is one of many crises of the present day. It is developing in a world engulfed by a polycrisis – overlapping shocks that simultaneously affect the global, social and individual levels. The pandemic, the climate crisis, wars and the spectre of war, shifting geopolitical power dynamics, deepening social stratification, political polarisation, information overload, the epidemic of loneliness and the mental health crisis – all of this is happening at once.

The UN report¹⁵ diagnoses the situation bluntly: “We live in a world full of worries. [...] Today, the world is teetering between one crisis and another, trapped in a cycle of constant firefighting and unable to tackle the root causes of its problems.” UNDP chief Achim Steiner comments: “There have been disasters and wars before, but the current accumulation of adverse factors is causing a regression in social development.” The report also documents a marked decline in people’s trust in each other.

Crisis of identity and future

Great uncertainty affects people’s sense of security and creates fear of the future. Agnieszka Jucewicz and Bogdan Dobroczyński write in their book *Tańcząc. Rozmowy o kryzysie i przemianie* (Dancing: Conversations about crisis and transformation)¹⁶: “The multiple crises are striking at people’s sense of identity. At the narrative of who they are, what their values, goals and dreams are, what they consider a good life to be. It will not be as you imagined. It will be different. We ask ourselves: What will happen to me now? How will I continue to live with this or in this? And even: who am I anyway?” People lose their self-confidence. They face challenges they did not want and rebel against – and they have to redefine themselves in relation to them.

¹⁴ This text concerns the crisis and therefore focuses on disturbing phenomena, threats and the dark side of reality. It does not aspire to be a balanced analysis, nor does it describe successes and good practices, which fortunately are not lacking and which prevent the phenomena described here from completely dominating reality.

¹⁵ UNDP, Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World, Human Development Report, 2022.

¹⁶ A. Jucewicz, B. Dobroczyński, *Dancing. Conversations about crisis and transformation*, 2024.

Crisis of trust in institutions

*The Edelman Trust Barometer*¹⁷ shows the scale of social frustration: 61% of respondents from 28 countries are dissatisfied with the actions of governments, elites and businesses. They feel wronged – they believe that the government and business make their lives difficult, serve narrow interest groups, and that the rich reap unfair benefits from the system.

In this context – a world that needs new solutions and leadership capable of engaging people in the search for them – leadership itself is in deep crisis. Both political and economic. Employees bring their fears, uncertainties and lack of security to organisations. This creates fertile ground for the crisis to deepen, as documented by all available research.

Anatomy of a leadership crisis

What is leadership?

Peter Drucker defined a leader simply:¹⁸ a leader is a person who has followers – people who trust them and are willing to voluntarily follow the direction they indicate. The essence of leadership is therefore mutual trust and commitment to achieving common goals. Trust and commitment are possible when leadership is balanced – focused both on the goal and on the needs of the people who are to achieve that goal. Good leadership has always had two wings: hard and soft.

- **The hard wing** – focused on results and efficiency: clear communication of expectations and goals, demanding, courageous, consistent, firm, challenge-oriented, evaluating, confronting standards, constructive feedback, responsibility for people, values, goals and quality.
- **Soft wing** – focused on people and relationships: creating an atmosphere of safety and openness, listening, showing trust, supporting, understanding, kindness, empathy, care, appreciation. Building strong emotional bonds with employees.

For leadership to be effective in the long term, both wings are needed – tough empathy, support and demanding on a daily basis. Today, all key aspects of leadership are in a bad state. We observe three interrelated dimensions of the crisis.

Dimension one: unsustainable leadership

The imbalance between the two sides is deepening. Managers are facing an increasing

¹⁷ Edelman, Edelman Trust Barometer 2025: Leadership under Pressure, 2025, <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2025/trust-barometer>.

¹⁸ Drucker, P.F., *Drucker's Guiding Thoughts*, 2002.

number of challenges and growing demands that they place on people and teams. However, they focus too little on employees and building relationships.

There is a clear bias towards short-term goals and efficiency. “The average manager currently has 51% more responsibilities than they can effectively handle,” says [Brent Cassell](#), vice president of HR at Gartner¹⁹. In such conditions, human and interpersonal aspects – conversations, support, relationship building – are the first to fall victim to a lack of time.

Dimension two: the crisis of trust

The DDI Global Leadership Forecast²⁰ paints a picture of a growing crisis of trust at all levels of the organisation. Leaders do not trust leaders. The level of trust leaders have in their superiors is surprisingly low – and falling. Trust in immediate superiors has fallen by 14 percentage points in just 24 months: from 46% to 32%. Leaders’ trust in senior management has remained consistently low for years, at 32%. Stability in this dimension is not encouraging: it means that 7 out of 10 leaders do not trust either their immediate superiors or senior management.

Employees do not trust leaders. Employee trust in leaders reveals a disturbing paradox: younger employees trust their supervisors and management more than older employees (a difference of about 10 percentage points). It seems that with seniority and career development, the level of trust declines – employees have bad experiences with leaders, and their disappointment grows. It is as if, over time, they lose their illusions about their superiors.

Economist Prof. Witold Orłowski comments on²¹: “If people do not trust each other, they cannot cooperate – the economy simply slows down. Countries with higher levels of trust perform better in terms of productivity and innovation.”

According to a report by the Poznań University of Economics, commissioned by the National Debt Register, the lack of trust in Polish business costs almost PLN 1 trillion a year. These are losses resulting from a lack of cooperation, delays in decision-making and excessive control procedures – a hidden “tax on mistrust”.

In *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*²², Patrick Lencioni describes how teams with low levels of trust behave. Their members: hide their weaknesses and mistakes from each other, are reluctant to ask for help or offer constructive feedback, are reluctant to offer help to others, do not recognise or benefit from the experiences of others, waste time and energy on safe

¹⁹ Gartner, The Manager Fatigue Report: How to support the overburdened leader, Press release dated 22 June 2023.

²⁰ DDI, Global Leadership Forecast 2025, 2025, <https://www.ddi.com/research/global-leadership-forecast-2025>.

²¹ Poznań University of Economics / KRD, Tax on distrust – the cost of social capital deficiency in Poland, 2024.

²² P. Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, 2016.

(rather than innovative) behaviours, jump to conclusions about the negative intentions of others, are vindictive and hold grudges, dislike collaboration and meetings, and find reasons to avoid spending time together.

This is not the characteristic of a team of supporters committed to pursuing a common goal. Rather, it is a recipe for serious difficulties or sometimes even disaster.

Third dimension: collapse of employee and manager engagement

Global employee engagement has declined for the first time in several years. According to Gallup's²³, in 2024, 21% of employees worldwide were engaged in their work (compared to 23% the previous year). At the same time, the proportion of "actively disengaged" employees – those who openly express a negative attitude towards their work – increased from 15% to 17%.

Europe is the region with the lowest level of engagement. The percentage of engaged employees here is only 13% (compared to 30% in North America). Poland performs particularly poorly. The engagement rate fell by 2 percentage points to 8% over the year. This is one of the lowest results in Europe: Poland ranked 35th among the 38 European countries surveyed. Polish employees are currently among the least engaged in the world.

The percentage of engaged managers worldwide fell from 30% to 27% in 2024 – less than one in three managers shows enthusiasm and is fully committed to their tasks. In Europe, the rate is 18%, and in Poland only 12%.

This is a key observation. Gallup argues that the relationship with the immediate supervisor has the greatest impact on employee engagement – leaders are responsible for about 70% of this engagement. If the leaders themselves are not engaged, it is difficult to expect engagement from their teams.

The deterioration in the condition of the management staff is the main factor in both the

At present, Poland's employee engagement rate has dropped to

8%

ranking the country among the lowest globally in terms of workforce commitment.

²³ Gallup, State of the Global Workplace: 2025 Report, 2025, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx>.

global and Polish decline in engagement. Although the detailed figures from various research centres vary slightly, the diagnosis is strikingly consistent: Poland is experiencing a deeper crisis of engagement than most European countries.

Deteriorating assessment of leadership quality

The crisis is reflected in the fact that leaders themselves are increasingly negative in their assessment of the quality of management in companies. According to DDI²⁴, assessments of leadership quality have remained low for over a decade. The percentage of leaders who consider the quality of leadership in their organisations to be high fluctuated between 37% and 48% between 2008 and 2024. After a brief increase during the pandemic, this level fell again and in the latest wave of the survey (2024) is at its lowest level in the entire series, close to 37%. DDI interprets this trend as a sign of a persistent systemic problem rather than a temporary deterioration in leadership.

The mechanism of the crisis

Where does the leadership crisis come from? Its sources can be observed at three levels: systemic (organisation), relational (leader–team) and individual (the leader themselves). These levels reinforce each other, creating a vicious circle.

Systemic level: what the organisation does

Everything, everywhere, at once – pressure for short-term results

Results are everything. Efficiency and optimisation. Organisations expect unquestionable performance from their leaders and their teams – and they want it immediately. The short-term perspective dominates: the expectation that leaders will “deliver” everything, under all circumstances.

In the short term, implementing change is associated with a decline in efficiency – everyone is learning, resistance arises. Before things get better, they first get a little worse. If there are a lot of changes – and there are a lot of them – teams and companies are exposed to inevitable declines. Despite this, organisations do not allow for this.

Excessive change, paralysis of priorities and lack of direction

In recent years, leaders have experienced and implemented a huge number of changes. They

²⁴ DDI (2025), Global Leadership Forecast 2025, 2025.

have restructured teams and departments, responded to disrupted supply chains, and faced new customer demands. They have learned to work remotely and in a hybrid manner, and have engaged teams in returning to the office. They have experienced digital transformation and introduced AI tools. They were expected to be visionaries and strategists, not just executors of procedures. All this with shrinking budgets.

The magnitude of the changes being implemented translates into a multitude of priorities. Leaders feel chaotic, not knowing which area to focus on when everything is important. This phenomenon is referred to as “priority paralysis” and “*change fatigue*”. According to an analysis by Gartner, the ability of European employees to cope with change has fallen by 50% compared to the pre-pandemic period.

In today’s chaotic world, employees need to know more than ever where the company is headed, what is important, and what to focus on. When leaders are confused, their teams are also overcome by a sense of uncertainty.

The disconnect between stated values and reality

In many organisations, there is a discrepancy between what the company proclaims and what it actually does. The company’s ideology and declared values are often far removed from the actual requirements.

People first. Development. Work-life balance. Well-being

The world of corporate values is beautiful. However, it is often a world of mere declarations, because the real expectations mainly concern results and figures. In many companies, behaviour that is inconsistent with values is tolerated as long as it brings measurable results. Leaders who achieve results, even at any cost, are appreciated: “Many times I was expected to do things that were irrational, unethical, and senseless. The worst thing is that I forced my team to do the same. I implemented decisions made by the company or my superior that I did not agree with.”

Such actions create dilemmas for leaders – loyalty weakens, cynicism grows, and trust in senior management declines. Employees stop believing in both their leaders and the organisation. This contrasts particularly with the standards of the youngest employees, who expect consistency between declarations and reality.

Insufficient development support

Insufficient development support for leaders within organisations is linked to a shortage of development programmes that strengthen the leadership skills that are so important today.

According to a Concordia Design study²⁵, 70% of leaders have never undergone any training in leadership or people management. 58% indicate that their biggest challenge is communicating with their team. More than half feel unprepared for this role.

The lack of support from superiors and the organisation also applies to several other issues. The first of these is unclear expectations and a multitude of priorities, which translate into a sense of chaos and uncertainty, and a lack of clarity about the direction. This is compounded by poor communication and weak justification for change. Leaders do not know enough about the context, purpose or reasons for the changes being introduced. In such situations, they lack arguments and justifications for their teams. This causes leaders to communicate change unilaterally, avoiding discussion with employees and confronting their resistance: “We don’t talk about change, we just enforce it”; “Why should I talk to an employee about change when I have no benefits/arguments for them?”

Another manifestation of insufficient support is the expectation that leaders will manage on their own if they demonstrate an overly delegating or even abdicating leadership style. The managers we work with complain about the lack of support and role models from above: “When I say I can’t cope, my boss tells me: ‘Then delegate, man, delegate’. But three-quarters of my people are just starting out, and I need to spend time with them, not delegate... I don’t want to hear that anymore.” “The organisation expects me to have regular one-on-one meetings with my employees, listen to them and support them. However, I don’t have one-on-one meetings with my boss, and when I want to talk about a really big problem, I hear: ‘Come back with a solution’.”

Relational level: between the leader and the team

No time for people

All of the systemic factors described above mean that leaders have too little time for management and for talking to people (“There’s no time for conversations here”). They also often avoid difficult situations, not wanting to face resistance and frustration from employees. They have no arguments (the change is poorly communicated, they themselves do not believe in it), and often lack *human skills* – competencies such as empathy, listening, working with emotions.

²⁵ Concordia Design, Taboos of Polish Leadership, 2024. <https://www.concordiadesign.pl/tabu-polskiego-leadershipu/>.

Unfulfilled employee expectations

For some time now, leaders have been facing growing and changing employee expectations. Two factors have had a particular impact on this change: the entry of new generations into the labour market and the pandemic and its consequences.

It is becoming increasingly important for people that their work is meaningful and has purpose. Employees expect: appreciation and feedback, opportunities for development, good relationships and a sense of belonging, being part of a good team, autonomy, flexibility and remote working. Quiet quitting, or moving away from the cult of work, is gaining importance. Employees do not want to constantly take on new challenges, excessive demands and sacrifices for the sake of their professional life.

They expect a lot from their leaders: to support them in achieving their goals and tasks, to create psychological safety, to be emotionally sensitive, to provide opportunities and tools for development, to have time for them – listen, talk about what is important to the employee and what is happening in the company, show understanding for deteriorating mental health, appreciate and give constructive feedback, have open conversations about goals and changing priorities, explain why we do what we do.

Few leaders and organisations are able to respond effectively to these needs. Most often, employees' expectations remain largely unmet. Leaders who act as an "emotional buffer" between the company's expectations and the needs of a stressed team most often choose the company's expectations.

One-way communication

Leaders' actions are dominated by demands. They rarely listen, rarely talk. They are not very empathetic or supportive: "We work our way: that means a lot, fast, without too much talking. It's okay, that's how we work here, this is not a company for wimps. Those who couldn't keep up are already somewhere else." This does not lead to increased trust, greater commitment or loyalty to the company.

Individual level: what happens to the leader

Lack of a sense of influence

The number of changes implemented by leaders is enormous, but a large proportion of these changes are not accepted by leaders. In many companies, changes are introduced without consultation, or consultations are superficial: "Management does not take our opinions into account at all. It does not take into account the realities and actual capabilities of our teams.

It expects us to do more with fewer people, and on top of that, it constantly changes its priorities.” “I have a problem with authenticity and authority when I am again convincing the team to make a change that I myself do not understand and do not accept – I do not believe in the task. I have a lot of young people in my team at , and they need a goal, a sense of purpose. But how does this relate to the strategy? It is obvious that it will not bring results.”

Leaders – especially middle and front-line managers, but also a large part of the executive staff – feel a lack of influence. Sometimes they also lose sight of the meaning of the actions they require from their teams. DDI research²⁶ shows that the percentage of leaders who consider their work meaningful is declining. Over a four-year period (between 2020 and 2024), only among senior management did the percentage of leaders who consider their work meaningful and purposeful increase, to 67%. The other groups showed a downward trend – in 2024, 56% of senior management, 48% of middle management and 35% of front-line leaders (a drop of 9 percentage points) considered their work meaningful. And when you lose your sense of purpose, you also lose your commitment: “We have many experienced leaders. They have been through it all – many strategies, restructurings, changes. They have their own way of being in the company: keep your head down and do what you’re told.”

I’ll get it done – an attitude of excessive responsibility

It can be said that the trend of quiet resignation has not affected leaders. They have not abandoned the cult of work, nor have they broken with the culture of rushing and constantly taking on new challenges. They set excessive demands on themselves and agree to excessive sacrifices for the sake of work. They are convinced that you always have to cope and “deliver”, that you have to be tough. They continue to cultivate a culture of infallibility (“I’ll get it done, I’ll fix it, I’ll carry it”). They are afraid to admit mistakes, reveal ignorance or lack of skills. It does not occur to them that they can ask for support – from colleagues, employees, consultants, therapists.

This attitude leads, on the one hand, to excessive responsibility and, on the other, to a feeling of loneliness. Professional loneliness is not only the lack of people around, but above all the lack of a feeling of being understood. For managers, the fear of revealing their weaknesses becomes a barrier.

Leaders feel that they are responsible for delivering everything. They are left to their own devices. Sometimes they consider this state of affairs to be natural.

²⁶ DDI (2025), Global Leadership Forecast 2025, 2025.

The loneliness of leaders

The loneliness of managers is a growing phenomenon. This situation is exacerbated by hybrid and remote working. Although leaders spend most of their time in meetings, the high intensity of contact does not translate into a sense of connection. Leaders lack conversation partners (*peer isolation*): they feel that they cannot share their concerns with their subordinates (so as not to lose authority) or with their superiors (so as not to appear incompetent). Pressured by the expectations of the board and the needs of their teams, they feel misunderstood by both sides: “As many as 82% of white-collar workers (including managers) in Poland say they experience loneliness at work. One in ten respondents admit that they talk about their loneliness with artificial intelligence because AI seems to be a more accessible and less judgemental listener than a superior or colleague”²⁷.

The road to burnout

All of the factors described – systemic, relational and individual – overlap and reinforce each other. The result is overload, which affects leaders more than any other professional group.

Leaders experience constant stress and continuous mobilisation at work. They are constantly in “on mode”. A large number of changes and priorities require constant switching between projects, constantly shifting attention from one task to another – for which they are most often responsible. Both constant switching and a sense of responsibility increase stress and exacerbate fatigue.

Fatigue and stress are also generated by factors beyond the control of leaders – those that have brought the world to the brink of chaos and make people feel helpless and lose hope: “Our resilience is already at its limit, and that limit is still being raised”; “There are so many changes that we feel close to burnout”; “I don’t know if I can still work at such an intensity.”

All of this leads to burnout. The data is alarming:

- approximately 25% of leaders globally say they feel burnt out “always” or “very often”, and another two-thirds experience this state at least sometimes²⁸;
- 53% of managers worldwide admit that they feel burnt out at work²⁹;
- 40% of managers declare that their mental health has deteriorated since taking on a managerial role³⁰;

²⁷ Symetria, Professional loneliness: when AI becomes your closest colleague, 2025.

²⁸ Gallup, State of the Global Workplace: 2024 Report, 2024.

²⁹ Deloitte, Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2024, 2024.

³⁰ Deloitte, Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2025, 2025.

- in Poland, approximately 29% of specialists and managers directly declare that they suffer from burnout syndrome³¹ ;
- almost 60% of leaders in Poland say they are “fed up with everything”, and in the case of managers of smaller teams, the rate rises to 75%³² ;
- 80% of leaders with up to two years of experience feel enormous pressure and burnout³³ .

Burnout is overwhelming fatigue, exhaustion and lack of energy. It is a need for isolation, distancing oneself – sarcasm, malice, cynicism. A reduced sense of influence, agency, loss of faith in one’s own competence. A growing lack of motivation, decreasing commitment. All this translates into frustration and declining team commitment.

Carl Newport wrote about “*great exhaustion*” and concluded: “We are all tired”³⁴ . Let us add: leaders are the most tired. It can be said that they constitute the elite of the “fatigue society” described by the Korean-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han in one of the most important diagnoses of the present day³⁵ .

The consequences of the leadership crisis

The great distance between employees and leaders and companies

Leadership has always been a contact sport. It has never been possible to exercise it from a distance. In a world on the brink of chaos, dominated by uncertainty and fear of the future, employees need empathetic leaders more than ever to be close by, supporting them and giving them a sense of security. They need them to help them engage in achieving clear goals and giving meaning to their work.

However, the prevailing trend is different. Leaders and companies are not responding – or responding too little – to the needs of employees. As a result, the two groups are growing further and further apart. Gallup describes this phenomenon as the great detachment. More and more employees say they do not feel connected to their company’s mission and purpose. The distance between leaders and their teams is growing.

And it is in this great detachment that the leadership crisis is most evident – starting with imbalance (a shift towards short-term results, too little attention paid to people and relationships) and manifesting itself in low levels of trust and engagement.

³¹ Hays Poland, 2024/2025.

³² Pluxee/IRCenter, Leaders’ Needs 2024, 2024, <https://www.pluxee.pl/blog/az-75-kierownikow-mniejszych-zespolow-od-czuwa-wypalenie-zawodowe/>.

³³ Concordia Design, Taboos of Polish Leadership, 2024.

³⁴ C. Newport, Why We’re All So Burned Out, The New Yorker, 2021.

³⁵ B.-C. Han, The Burnout Society, 2022.

Unbossing – escaping leadership

In the context of everything that has been described, it is not surprising that employees increasingly perceive managerial positions as high-risk roles – with enormous pressure, responsibility and the spectre of burnout on the horizon.

There is a growing reluctance to take on managerial positions and promotions. This is a conscious career strategy, a choice based on cold calculation: rejecting managerial roles in favour of expert development and protecting one's own well-being. This phenomenon is called *unbossing*.

Young employees in particular – mainly Generation Z and millennials – perceive middle management as a trap: a place with high levels of stress, threatening the loss of *work-life balance*, and offering relatively low prestige and financial benefits (too little difference in salary compared to a specialist). They fear managing their colleagues and “mediating” between the unrealistic goals of the board and the needs of the team.

According to a report by Robert Walters,³⁶, as many as 52% of Generation Z representatives worldwide do not want to take on middle management positions. What is more, 72% prefer individual development (a specialist career path) to managing people. In Europe, the aversion to being a boss is strongest. According to *Michael Page Talent Trends 2024*, more than half of Europeans (57%) prioritise their mental health over a higher position³⁷.

Poland is at an interesting point – on the one hand, we are chasing Western trends, but on the other, economic pressure remains strong.

According to *Deloitte Global Gen Z & Millennial Survey 2025 (Poland)*, only 6% of respondents from this group indicated taking on a managerial position as their main goal. By comparison, as many as 70% focus on developing specific skills³⁸.

Poles are less likely than Western Europeans to turn down a promotion (42% vs. 57%) – probably for financial reasons – but they are doing so more and more often. This represents



³⁶ Robert Walters, 2024/2025.

³⁷ Michael Page, Talent Trends 2024.

³⁸ Deloitte, Global Gen Z & Millennial Survey 2025 (Poland), 2025.

an increase of several percentage points over the last three years.

The spectre of a managerial collapse?

The growing systemic crisis among managers described above (the accumulation of chronic stress, burnout, pressure of responsibility and insufficient organisational support) may lead to a critical point in the functioning of managers. There is even talk of the beginning of a *manager crash*³⁹, which threatens to deepen the leadership crisis. Fluctuation in managerial positions has increased. Many organisations report difficulties in retaining and recruiting managerial staff. The phenomenon of the *great resignation* has also affected managerial positions – according to a global DDI report, as many as 40% of senior staff admitted that they are considering resigning from leadership roles for the sake of their well-being⁴⁰. This threatens to disrupt the continuity of key managerial positions. The DDI study⁴¹ even describes this situation as an impending “wave of leadership exodus” driven by stress and burnout. Without decisive action, companies may face a succession crisis – a generational gap in leadership that will hinder their further development.

Economic cost

A leadership crisis is a crisis of engagement, and a decline in employee engagement translates directly into lower productivity for companies and economies. Gallup estimates that if all employees worldwide were fully engaged, global GDP could be up to 9% higher. The cost of disengagement is almost one-tenth of the global economy. It means less innovation, lower quality, poorer customer service, lower sales and efficiency.

If the trend is not reversed and the leadership crisis deepens, companies will lose opportunities for development and growth. Soon, employees and leaders may run out of fuel – trust and engagement – to continue the struggle. This will happen if leaders do not regain the trust of their employees and build an environment in which people want to work. There will be no way out of the crisis without the involvement of the leaders themselves. Managers are responsible for about 70% of employee engagement – a correlation that should be the starting point for any recovery strategy.

³⁹ meQuilibrium / Fortune, Firms Face ‘Manager Crash’ in 2025, 2025.

⁴⁰ DDI, New DDI Study Signals Looming Leadership Exodus, with 71% Reporting Increased Stress, 2025, <https://www.ddi.com/about/media/global-leadership-forecast-2025#:~:text=PITTSBURGH%2C%20PA%2C%20Jan,structural%20breakdown%20in%20leadership%20pipelines>.

⁴¹ DDI, Global Leadership Forecast 2025 Study Signals Looming Leadership Exodus, 2025.

What next for the leadership crisis?

Two scenarios

Two distinct trends will emerge in the coming years. The dominant trend will be a deepening leadership crisis in companies that are overly focused on optimisation – with unsustainable leadership, low trust and low engagement. This scenario is more likely in a situation of economic slowdown or crisis (see: the AI bubble). On the other hand, any economic growth will be reinforced by a second, smaller but distinct trend involving companies that are ripe for change. Thanks to authentic, sustainable leadership, they will attract talent, build a culture of trust and commitment, and become market leaders.

Artificial intelligence will begin to take over hard administrative tasks – planning, reporting, performance monitoring – which may relieve leaders, freeing up 30-40% of their time. The question is: will leaders use this time to build relationships (mature companies), or will they be given more tasks instead (companies operating in the old way)?

Emerging from the crisis

Companies consciously facing the crisis will take systematic measures to promote sustainable leadership and increase trust and engagement. To stop the crisis, these measures must be taken at every level of the organisation.

Management level: setting the tone

Management boards will set the tone for change and lead by example. Key areas of action include:

- **Showing direction and open communication.** Moving away from management based solely on numbers (KPIs) in favour of managing relationships and organisational culture. Changing the narrative: moving from the language of pure efficiency to the language of mission and values. The vision will include not only “1.5% EBITDA growth” but also a meaningful goal that is understandable to employees.
- **Radical transparency.** Open communication of goals, changes, new priorities, difficulties. Explaining why we do what we do – including optimisation. Bridging the gap between declared values and actual business practice.
- **Being close to people.** Board members will become more visible. They will hold regular meetings (Q&A sessions, *town halls*), genuinely encouraging questions and answering without censorship. They will implement the practices they expect from leaders in the organisation.

HR level: systemic support

HR departments will focus on recognising good leadership and leaders. This will make leaders feel important again and leadership valued. Actions in the following areas are to be expected:

- **Revision of incentive systems.** A new definition of managerial success: a shift from purely financial KPIs to indicators based on good leadership – level of trust and commitment, preparation of successors, talent retention. Appreciating and rewarding empathetic leaders who build relationships and trust.
- **Increasing the attractiveness of managerial roles.** Remuneration that encourages people to take up positions. Real relief from operational tasks. Significant bonuses for “human results” (engagement, retention, talent development). Appointing people with high interpersonal skills to managerial positions, rather than just experts who deliver results.
- **Investment in leadership skills development.** Broadly defined development programmes that prepare leaders to perform their roles in a sustainable manner. Training in mental resilience, empathy, conducting difficult conversations, and feedback. *Human skills* as a priority.
- **Feedback culture.** Taking tools for regularly listening to employees (*pulse checks*) seriously – with a guarantee of corrective action.
- **Creating space for meetings, building relationships and sharing experiences.** *Action learning* sessions (at the end of the project, after the change has been implemented), during which leaders share their experiences and doubts, support each other, and draw conclusions from their successes and mistakes. Mentoring and coaching programmes that support competence development, experience retention in the organisation and relationship building.

Manager level: sustainable leadership practice

Managers will increasingly practise good, sustainable leadership.

- **Tough empathy.** Combining high expectations with genuine support. Greater support for employees. Abandoning superficial meetings, limiting one-way communication in favour of listening during regular 1:1 meetings.
- **Human skills in everyday leadership practice.** Empathy, active listening, building psychological safety in the team. Moving away from micromanagement. Helping employees develop their skills, giving them more autonomy.
- **Feedback and appreciation.** More frequent feedback. More appreciation, a little less judgement.
- **Caring for one's own well-being.** Putting the principle of “Put your oxygen mask on first” into practice. Remembering that a burnt-out leader is unable to support the team. Granting

oneself the right to set boundaries and seek support.

The road to good, sustainable leadership is bumpy. Even showing empathy will encounter many barriers⁴². You can promise blood, sweat and tears – but also a lot of satisfaction: from the development of colleagues, working in an energetic team, good relationships based on trust, a sense of purpose and shared responsibility. And also from achieving goals. After all, meaning, trust and commitment translate into hard business results. It is not a choice between soft values and results. It is the only way to achieve lasting results. Companies that make this effort will build an advantage that is difficult to copy – a culture in which people want to work and give more of themselves.

Blanchard's research⁴³ shows several basic barriers to leaders showing empathy. Fifty-three per cent of managers mention pressure to perform. Forty-seven per cent say they lack experience or feel uncomfortable discussing emotionally charged topics. Thirty per cent fear that doing so will show weakness and a lack of professionalism. Another barrier is the lack of example from above: 37% of company CEOs believe that there is no place for empathy in the company.



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⁴² Blanchard, Leading with Empathy While Holding People Accountable, 2025, <https://resources.blanchard.com/servant-leadership/leading-with-empathy-and-accountability-pov>.

⁴³ Blanchard (2025), Leading with Empathy While Holding People Accountable, 2025.



trend #3

Michał Zaborek, Iwona Wieczorek

More is not necessarily **better**

More is not necessarily better. Why does “access to everything” yield almost zero results?

If we looked at the present from the perspective of people from the past, even the not-so-distant past (about 30 years ago), we would undoubtedly conclude that we live in times of prosperity. Global trends are overlaid by our local (increase in the country’s wealth) or individual trends, which may be felt by a large proportion of us. Here are some trend indicators, from global to local:

- The number of people living in poverty worldwide⁴⁴ has fallen from around 2 billion in 1995 to around 700-800 million today.
- Poland’s gross domestic product has grown from around USD 140 billion in 1995 to around USD 1,040 billion in 2025⁴⁵. In 2020, it was around USD 600 billion, so in the last 5 years alone it has grown by 73%⁴⁶.
- Number of cars per capita in Poland: 1995 – 0.195 cars, 2023 – 0.72 cars (data for 2023)⁴⁷.
- Today, 96.2% of households in our country have access to the internet⁴⁸ – and this percentage is growing every year, albeit slowly, of course.
- In order not to stick only to soulless numbers, we will give one more indicator: in the happiness ranking, we occupy a record 26th place for our country⁴⁹, and there are many indications that this is not the end of our progress (in 2015, we were in 60th place). Poland is increasingly mentioned as one of the best places to live, which 15-20 years ago would have been considered a pipe dream or a bad joke.

Progress can also be seen in development ecosystems. Today, we have access to thousands of on-demand courses. However, according to the Blanchard 2026 report⁵⁰, organisations are increasingly falling into the “subscription trap”. They fear that employees are not engaging in systematic content acquisition, which leads to wasted investment. That is why it is worth focusing on the most valuable and recognised resources. The winners are those

⁴⁴ More at: <https://ourworldindata.org/poverty>. When analysing this data, it is important to bear in mind the overall increase in the world’s population during this period – from 5.7 billion to 8.2 billion.

⁴⁵ This is a nominal increase of approximately 650%. GDP calculated in terms of purchasing power increased by over 520% – data from: <https://www.worldometers.info/gdp/poland-gdp/>.

⁴⁶ This is an impressive increase, but it is worth remembering that the strengthening of the zloty against the USD has helped to boost these statistics.

⁴⁷ Data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS) and from the article: Statistical Portal, Cars in Poland, 2024, <https://portalstatystyczny.pl/samochody-w-polsce/>.

⁴⁸ GUS, Information Society in Poland in 2025, 2025.

⁴⁹ The Earth Institute Columbia University, The World Happiness Report, data from: <https://www.worldhappiness.report/>. Data for 2015: <https://files.worldhappiness.report/WHR15.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Blanchard, 2026 HR / L&D Trends Survey. Moving from Trends to Insights: Navigating the 2026 Landscape.

who, instead of a “library of everything”, offer access to high-quality standards of leadership thinking, embedded in specific business realities.

The data mentioned at the beginning is optimistic and does not fit in with the narrative of pessimism and anxiety of recent years. We do not mean to say that the world is beautiful and colourful – there are also many challenges. It is worth mentioning, for example, the demographic collapse, the effects of which we will feel in the coming decades. Another important issue is the significant increase in the number of armed conflicts, which have a huge impact on the sense of security/threat⁵¹. Nevertheless, we want to contrast this with the general climate of pessimism that dominates the media.

The development of people in organisations takes place against the backdrop of these (and many other) phenomena. Here, too, we have experienced numerous positive changes. We can observe several of them in our market, although it is much more difficult to obtain very accurate data in this case:

- Between 2004 and 2013, we received and utilised a huge pool of EU funds from the European Social Fund. The operational programmes “Human Resources Development” and “Human Capital” popularised training, human development and the profession of business trainer on a massive scale in our country. This was the catalyst for the creation of hundreds of training companies. Development subsidies reached almost €13 billion during this period.
- Employment offices have undergone a profound change: from places for “registering for benefits” and relics of the previous system, to modern and partially digitised organisations working to activate people in the labour market and partners for local businesses, with whom cooperation can be strategic.
- There are many instruments and support funds for people who want to return to the labour market, change careers or start a new business, whereas 20 or 30 years ago, the landscape was rather barren. There is also a wide range of support available in the process of finding the right instruments – from local and central government as well as the private sector.

Again, this is not an entirely positive picture, but it is difficult to see all these phenomena as anything other than changes for the better⁵². The same is true for the professional development of people in organisations. The pandemic has forced changes and intensified competition in the industry. We have a professionalised training and consulting market, of which we ourselves

⁵¹ Details in the report: Piro, Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2024, 2025, <https://static.poder360.com.br/2025/06/relatorio-prio-conflict-trends-divulgado-em-junho-de-2025.pdf>.

⁵² We could add to this list, among other things: more flexible forms of work, an increase in the share of people with higher education in the labour market, higher wages, and the internationalisation of our economy.

are a part. In recent years, we have seen a proliferation of new companies and development options, in various forms and varieties. We have become a mature market. Today, the offer is richer than ever before. This applies to individual customers as well as companies and institutions. The basic awareness of society has increased; for some time now, we have been talking about a trend for development.

A particularly noticeable change in recent years concerns access to knowledge. We live in an age of information overload, with knowledge “attacking” us from all sides. Today, anyone can be a creator. Social media has become a source of advice, development tools and instruments for improving the quality of life and career.

The main challenge is not access to knowledge, but time – and, crucially, our attention (see box and commentary from our partners at Harvard Business Impact). This is, of course, related to the ways in which content is consumed, mainly on smartphones, which leads to an endless need for dopamine rushes and the assimilation of increasingly shorter, emotional sets, mainly in the form of video. The result is familiar to us all – reduced attention span, a declining ability to think critically, and an inability to concentrate on longer forms, let alone perceive them. There is a certain contradiction here: we all complain about the lack of time. However, we find hours to scroll through apps that offer dopamine hits⁵³.

The second, equally important challenge is the quality and credibility of the content we encounter. It is difficult to assess whether we are on the verge of attempts to rein in self-proclaimed experts on everything, but it is worth mentioning a recent change in the law in... China. The country has banned the publication of specialist content on the internet by people without the appropriate education and qualifications. The regulations currently apply to only four areas: law, finance, medicine and... education⁵⁴. The reason for introducing sanctions is a legitimate concern about the quality of content, advice and tools promoted by people without knowledge and foundations. One need only analyse the flood of conspiracy theories in recent years. We predict that the attempt to curb the credibility of online creators is a trend that will spread to other countries in the coming years, not just autocratic ones.

The issues mentioned above: time, mindfulness, quality and credibility will soon be of great importance for workplace development and effectiveness. This is confirmed by the experiences of numerous organisations and our observations regarding access to ready-made

⁵³ We will stop here – we encourage you to take a moment to reflect on this contradiction.

⁵⁴ We are far from looking for models of public or online life in China, but this example is the only attempt we know of to rein in self-proclaimed experts operating on the internet. Data on this phenomenon: J. Klupa, No more pseudo-expert advice from influencers. China cracks down on online experts without degrees, 2025, <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/swiat/artykuly/10570032,koniec-z-pseudoeksperckimi-poradami-influencerow-chiny-uderzaja-w-int.html>.

content libraries, which are breaking popularity records. In recent years, we have seen their dynamic growth.

As in many other markets, there are numerous cases of growth through acquisition on the global stage. Giant technology companies are emerging that are consolidating the market⁵⁵. Some of them offer vast libraries in standardised formats with attractive graphics. In line with general content consumption standards, the video format dominates, so in a light, easy and enjoyable way⁵⁶ we can immerse ourselves in the world of necessary knowledge and skills and develop in the workplace and beyond – access is possible from any location and device. Large companies naturally choose large providers offering a wide range of development content.

Employees gain access to huge development databases. CEOs swell with pride – the organisations they run are up to date. HR departments, in good faith, support implementation, provide advice when needed, and count on satisfied recipients, increased competence and better business indicators.

And what happens? In the vast majority of cases: nothing.

Really, this is no exaggeration. We are witnessing spectacular implementation failures of ready-made development platforms based on unlimited access to modules on almost every topic. In many cases, it is difficult to talk about improved business indicators due to the fact that access and consumption of content is already a challenge. We have had numerous conversations with representatives of organisations where the main implementation problem is the lack of user activity on the platforms. This applies in particular to managers, but not only to them.

Employees, having access to “everything”, most often do not use anything. This means that development budgets are overspent and there is a lack of any effectiveness of such activities – which, as usual, were preceded by good intentions. If things are so good, why are they so bad? And how can this be remedied?

What does the excess and oversupply of content mean for the development of people in organisations?

Since, as we have shown above, access to resources is no longer the key limitation, but rather time, attention and the ability to select (the reliability and quality of libraries), the development

⁵⁵ For example, in December 2025, Udemy announced that it had been acquired by Coursera for approximately \$2.5 billion. The transaction is expected to be completed in 2026. The goal is almost traditional: consolidation and economies of scale, but some analysts point to the challenges of offering large libraries of ready-made content in a situation where AI is becoming more widespread.

⁵⁶ A touch of sarcasm, intentional.

of people in organisations is now governed by completely different laws than a few years ago. And this is where we see a series of shifts that will soon determine whether the content libraries, of which we already have many on the market, will be a resource or just a costly illusion of development.

From access to action

The starting point on which many development initiatives in companies have been based for years is simply wrong: there is still an assumption that access equals development, that if we give people a content library, a platform, hundreds of courses – development will “happen by itself”. This model (sometimes theoretically) still works in formal education. It does not work at work, especially in such dynamic times as today.



Adults (employees) learn when they need to solve something, not because “it is worth developing”. Learning in organisations is not an activity detached from reality – it is a response to specific tasks, problems and decisions. And that is why the key question is: what does the company really expect – knowledge or a change in behaviour/actions/functioning? If the answer is a change in behaviour, we are talking about a completely different level of effort than providing access to content⁵⁷.

A shift in the trend is becoming increasingly apparent: from “learn what you want” to designing experiences that lead the employee from learning straight to application. This is the logic of *learning in the flow of work*⁵⁸, which has been talked about for years, but which is only now beginning to be implemented more pragmatically⁵⁹.

It is worth pointing out one more change: pressure not to assess development declaratively, but only through real results at work. This trend is very evident in *upskilling* and *reskilling*, understood as elements of change rather than “separate training activities detached

⁵⁷ A trend report showing how L&D leaders view learning in the flow of work and what participants expect: 360learning, 2022 Report: The State of Learning in the Flow of Work, <https://360learning.com/guide/learning-in-the-flow-of-work-report/learning-in-the-flow-of-work-report/>.

⁵⁸ Explanation of the concept of learning in the flow of work as the integration of learning with everyday work: Didask, What is Learning in the Flow of Work?, 2026, <https://www.didask.com/en/post/learning-in-the-flow-of-work>.

⁵⁹ J. Bersin, A New Paradigm For Corporate Training: Learning In The Flow of Work, 2018, <https://joshbersin.com/2018/06/a-new-paradigm-for-corporate-training-learning-in-the-flow-of-work/>.

from reality”⁶⁰.

From “long-term programmes” to adaptive solutions

There is another factor in the background: the pace of change in business. Change is no longer cyclical, but continuous. Many organisations are already facing the problem of adapting their business models to reality, and in the next step, designing development solutions that can keep up with this dynamic.

We operate in a situation where a solution designed today may not meet the challenges of tomorrow. This undermines the point of long, closed programmes developed “once every few years”. That is why two elements are becoming increasingly important: embedding development in a real business context and the flexibility of solutions that can be modified on an ongoing basis⁶¹.

And here comes an important clarification: large content libraries are not a problem in themselves. In an unstable environment, they can be a valuable resource, provided that they do not serve as a self-service knowledge repository, but rather as material for conscious development modelling.

From a collection of content to a designed experience

The second key element concerns context. Very often, the problem is not the quality of the content – it can be really good. The problem is that it exists in a vacuum. Libraries are, by definition, general, detached from the specific realities of the company: its processes, culture, tools, KPIs or work rhythm. In most cases, it cannot be otherwise – this remark does not apply to organisations that consciously build internal content libraries that are strongly embedded in the business context. In other cases, this context does not appear on its own. Solution designers should be responsible for building a bridge between resources and their usability and application. And that requires awareness and competence.

If an employee does not see the connection between the content and what they have to do tomorrow, they will not “buy” the idea. Even the best material remains a curiosity or a burden on the computer’s memory, rather than real support for action. This leads to another trend: the growing importance of selection and moderation. Implementing a platform is one thing, but

⁶⁰ V. Bérubé, M. Metakis, M. Ocampo, Redefine AI upskilling as a change imperative, 2025, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/the-organization-blog/redefine-ai-upskilling-as-a-change-imperative>.

⁶¹ Article on adaptive approaches in L&D and responding quickly to changes in business: M. Kelly, Dynamic Learning and Development Strategies, 2025, <https://www.gartner.com/en/articles/learning-and-development>.

it is equally important to assign the task of modelling development solutions from available resources to an employee or team: selectively, consciously and flexibly. With attention to the changing conditions around them. This theme corresponds well with what is emphasised by Harvard Business Impact research: effectiveness increases when the distance between learning and application is shortened, and organisations choose less content, but more closely related⁶² to real needs⁶³.

From “more choice” to priorities and user guidance

Another problem worth looking at is the excess of options, i.e. the classic paradox of choice⁶⁴. Large libraries were supposed to be a benefit, but in practice they often become a decision-making burden. Hundreds and thousands of materials do not help – they make it difficult to take the first step. Employees do not know where to start, so... they do not start. This mechanism is well described in decision psychology: too many options can be demotivating and reduce the willingness to act (classic studies by S. Iyengar and M. Lepper)⁶⁵. In practice, this will mean a shift in trend: from thoughtless sharing of huge libraries to selective offering based on real needs and business priorities. Large resources do not disappear – they remain in the background as potential. However, the way in which they are given meaning is changing: recommendations, paths, “start here” tips. This is consciously guiding the employee through the learning process.

From “pretty bars” to responsibility for transfer

One of the systemic problems of large libraries is the lack of responsibility for what happens after training – for the transfer of knowledge and its use in action, and thus for bringing about behavioural change. After completing a course, reading an article or watching a video, no one usually asks what has changed. The manager is not involved in the process. Development happens alongside work, not as part of it. And if something happens alongside work, it simply does not work.

The result is an illusion of development: “we have a platform”, “people have access”, the reports look good. Importantly, this model does not require changing processes or working

⁶² Harvard Business Publishing, How the Workforce Learns in 2019, <https://www.harvardbusiness.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/How-Workforce-Learns-2019-Report.pdf>.

⁶³ Harvard Business Publishing, How the Workforce Learns in 2019, <https://www.harvardbusiness.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/How-Workforce-Learns-2019-Report.pdf>.

⁶⁴ Summary of the concept of paradox in reference to the book: B. Schwartz, The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less, 2004.

⁶⁵ S. S. Iyengar, M. R. Lepper, When Choice is Demotivating: Can One Desire Too Much of a Good Thing?, 2000. <https://faculty.washington.edu/jdb/345/345%20Articles/Iyengar%20%26%20Lepper%20%282000%29.pdf>.

with managers – it is simpler and easier to implement in the short term. Except that this development is more like a message than a result. Hence another shift in the trend: from measuring activity to taking responsibility for results. From: “How many people completed the course?” to: “What are they doing differently today?”

From activity reports to measuring the quality of decisions

Easily verifiable indicators still dominate: the number of logins and completed training courses or the time spent on the platform. The problem is that they do not in any way indicate whether anything has changed in the behaviour of employees and in the results of their work. Activity in this case is not synonymous with effectiveness.

In this context, a content library can be at best a foundation – not a solution. The library itself does not design learning, support decision-making, or guide through real challenges. It only starts to work when it is part of a larger system: processes, the role of a manager, or the context of work.

It is no coincidence that, despite the growing availability of content, almost half of L&D *and talent development* specialists today point to a skills crisis, which shows that access to knowledge alone does not automatically translate into the ability to implement a business strategy. Therefore, the key question today is not “What library to implement?”, but “How to package it so that it works?”, “How to work with it so that it adds value?”, “How to manage the wealth of content so that it makes sense?”, “What mechanisms, roles and expectations must complement it so that it leads to real change and not just improved statistics?”⁶⁶ .

Summary: the end of illusion, the beginning of responsibility

Large content libraries are neither new, nor groundbreaking, nor the future of L&D. They are infrastructure – necessary, but insufficient. The problem begins when we try to sell them as a development solution in and of themselves. The trend that is clearly emerging is not to abandon libraries, but to move away from the illusions that access means development, that activity means effectiveness, and that people will “learn on their own”. In the near future, it will not be those who gain access to the largest content resources who will win, but those who

⁶⁶ LinkedIn Learning, Workplace Learning Report 2025 The rise of career champions, 2025, <https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report>.

are able to: set the direction, establish priorities, embed the learning process in the workplace, involve managers and measure development outcomes.

The market is already sensing this – there is a clear shift away from ready-made solutions. Currently, as many as 59% of organisations⁶⁷ prefer customised programmes, recognising that standard subscriptions are too generic. “Packaging” them into personalised development paths provides a response to the company’s real competence gaps. In this sense, libraries become a litmus test of L&D maturity: alone do not change anything. They only make sense when they are part of a system that leads from content through action to effect⁶⁸.

commentary:



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Despite significant advances in technology and the availability of content in many formats, questions about the effectiveness of learning in organisations remain relevant. Why is this the case?

Learning always takes place in context, and that context has recently faced many challenges. The number one challenge is not technology or access to content, but time. The time you can and want to devote to development and learning – and then to thinking and reflecting on the learning process itself, on what you have learned. The conditions around us have changed, and our attention is being bombarded from all sides. The second challenge is the ability to concentrate, and the third is finding the right information and tools that we want to develop and implement.

Organisations often offer and require too much learning in too little time, without allowing sufficient time for practice and reflection. It is better to select less content, but content that is more relevant to current needs. This is often the source of later problems; you need to be able to identify what is important.

Culture also tends not to encourage changes in behaviour: without analysing the impact of the environment, little will change. A perfect example of this is the implementation of

⁶⁷ Blanchard, 2026 HR / L&D Trends Survey: Turning Uncertainty Into Opportunity: Navigating the 2026 Landscape.

⁶⁸ Blanchard, 2026 HR / L&D Trends Survey: Turning Uncertainty Into Opportunity: Navigating the 2026 Landscape.

AI, which is still in its infancy in many organisations.

According to the latest HBI research, what are leaders' expectations for development?

The expectation is that there should be no time or practical gap between the moment you learn something and the moment you start applying it. We don't want to 'learn for later'. So it's not about "more" content or "better" content, but about ensuring that what we learn is as closely correlated as possible with what we are doing now at work, what we need today or tomorrow. Without such rapid implementation, knowledge and new skills can be perceived as "background noise" to what is important. There is also an expectation for personalisation of content and, increasingly, the form in which it is delivered (and here the role of AI in the future will be enormous), so that it can be tailored to the preferences of the individual.

Therefore: transferring knowledge into practice as quickly as possible, learning – and then, as quickly as possible, acting in the workplace. Companies that will be able to minimise the time between identifying a need and implementing changes related to that need in the future will build a competitive advantage. We write about this in our latest report, the 2025 Global Leadership Development Study⁶⁹. Another interesting development in recent years is the expectation for knowledge about whether artificial intelligence is used in the development process. This may be temporary, but managers want to know when they are dealing with AI-assisted tools.

We most often deal with change, but what remains constant in the world of human development?

The COVID-19 pandemic and the following years have shown that basic skills such as empathy, contextual understanding and emotional intelligence are not subject to change. AI cannot replace these, at least for now. The basic principles that have a positive impact on the effectiveness of development programmes have also remained unchanged. These are: action, thinking, commitment, cooperation with other people during development, and the human ability to give meaning to what we do.

⁶⁹ Survey conducted in 2025 on a group of over 1,100 people, mainly L&D and HR professionals and leaders/heads of functions from over 14 countries. Full report: Harvard Business Impact, 2025 Global Leadership Development Study, <https://www.harvardbusiness.org/insight/2025-global-leadership-development-study/>.



partner

e-learning.pl is the technology partner of House of Skills. The company specializes in comprehensive educational solutions delivered using modern technologies. Its flagship area of activity is a continuously expanded and regularly updated library of e-learning courses, including full trainings and microlearning modules, covering topics such as leadership, management, and legal regulations. The offering is complemented by modern learning platforms, made available to clients through flexible usage models, supporting the systematic development of competencies within organizations.



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Harvard Business Impact is a partner of e-learning.pl, offering modern development solutions for leaders and managers. Its offering includes Harvard ManageMentor – an e-learning platform covering over 40 Harvard courses in the areas of Lead Yourself, Lead Others, Lead the Business. This is complemented by the Harvard Business Publishing Collection – a business library with over 25,000 materials (articles, podcasts, videos, checklists, thematic playlists), perfect for microlearning, supporting a culture of development and as a premium benefit for management staff.



trend #4

Łukasz Nowak

Machine **culture**

Machine culture

When, in the mid-15th century, German craftsman Johannes Gutenberg popularised printing with movable type, probably only a handful of visionaries were able to predict the impact of this invention on the future of humanity. Printing technology, through a new way of transmitting and selecting knowledge, initiated a series of cultural, social and political changes. First, it significantly accelerated the Protestant Reformation and its spread, which contributed to religious conflicts in 16th- and 17th-century Europe, and then it laid the foundations for the development of science and industry. Access to knowledge became easier, faster and possible for new social groups. Artificial intelligence plays a similar role – it also mediates the transfer of knowledge and selects it, but adds a new, very important functionality – it can learn and create new knowledge. Thus, its impact on our lives becomes incomparably greater than that of previous inventions, such as the printing press.

In recent years, analyses and studies have begun to appear on the impact of artificial intelligence on corporate organisational cultures. This is another area that initially seemed to be the domain of humans, inaccessible to algorithms, and is now gradually being taken over by artificial intelligence. One could even venture to say that in the coming years we will see a fundamental shift: from a culture created exclusively by humans to a model of *machine culture*, where machine and human intelligence intertwine. Since AI learns from human knowledge, and humans in turn draw on its resources, a system of mutual information exchange is created, something like the collective intelligence of humans and machines.

When AI enters culture

The impact of artificial intelligence on the shape of organisational cultures will be stronger the more often employees and managers use nudges generated by algorithms (*nudgetech*) of language models such as ChatGPT in their daily work. Imagine a sales team manager preparing for one-on-one meetings with employees to summarise annual results and set new sales and development goals. This is a difficult moment – a study by Zenger Folkman indicates that 44% of the 7,631 managers surveyed find giving feedback stressful or difficult, and 21% generally avoid negative feedback feedback⁷⁰. It is therefore not surprising that in these situations, managers are increasingly looking to AI assistants for guidance – a study conducted in the United Kingdom shows that as many as 59% of managers who already use AI

⁷⁰ J. Zenger, J. Folkman, Why Do So Many Managers Avoid Giving Praise?, Harvard Business Review, 2017.

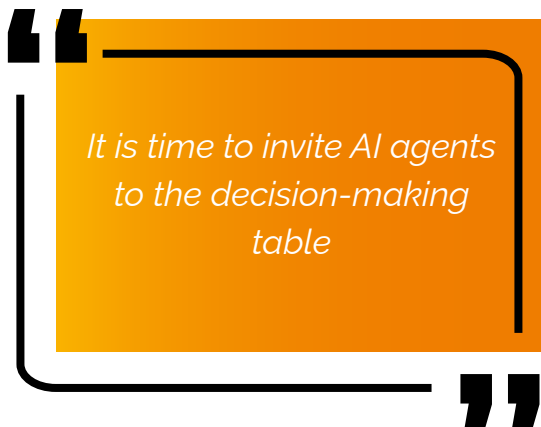
technology use it to evaluate the performance of their subordinates and provide feedback⁷¹.

Feedback conversations strongly reveal the practices that shape a company's organisational culture – for example, the extent to which a manager requires customer focus, pragmatism or dogmatism in applying rules, the extent to which they inspire commitment, and the extent to which they push and enforce. These components will be signals indicating the behaviours preferred in the company. Therefore, the AI assistant's suggestions on what and how to communicate to the employee during the meeting will shape behaviours and practices, i.e. the organisational culture. If the manager approaches these suggestions critically, they will retain control over the shape of the organisational culture in the team and the company. However, if they abandon this distance and begin to unconsciously or conveniently apply suggestions regarding even minor changes in behaviour, attitudes and beliefs (and organisational culture usually changes in this way), then AI will de facto begin to influence the company's organisational culture and may do so beyond human control.

In recent decades, models describing organisational culture, also in relation to company strategy, have grown in popularity, giving the impression that we are able to control this difficult-to-describe phenomenon. Now there is a risk that we will hand over the control we have just gained over the shape of organisational cultures to artificial intelligence. This is dangerous because, for the good of the company, organisational culture should be subordinate to business strategy and changed in a conscious and targeted manner through the consistent actions of the entire management team.

AI as a full-time employee

If we accept that artificial intelligence will actively influence organisational practices and shape employee behaviour, the question arises: should bots, assistants and AI agents be treated like human employees? Should we ask them for their opinion during meetings, just like other employees? Should their voice be taken into account when making decisions, on an equal footing with other employees, such as board members? Since we use these prompts individually, often in secret,



It is time to invite AI agents to the decision-making table

⁷¹ I. Jackson, People managers admit to using AI for performance reviews and feedback, research finds, People Management, 2024, <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1875801/people-managers-admit-using-ai-performance-reviews-feedback-research-finds>.

why not do so openly in a team forum? It is probably time to give AI agents a real seat at the table or in the Teams window. From the point of view of diagnosing organisational culture (), it is reasonable to ask whether AI agents should be invited to participate in such studies on an equal footing with other participants. If these are internal models operating within closed systems, “reading” employees’ daily email correspondence and thus gaining knowledge about people’s behaviour and organisational practices, then the answer to this question should be yes.

Diagnosis of the future and the “black box” syndrome

Artificial intelligence will open up new possibilities for diagnosing organisational cultures. Currently, the most commonly used methods are surveys, in-depth interviews and group interviews, which are costly and time-consuming. The Culture Factor is testing a new AI-based model called ROCI (*Real-time Organisational Culture Insights*), which takes a radically different approach. We no longer ask all employees what their perception of the organisation’s culture is, but put algorithms to work. First, we teach the AI agent what organisational culture is and how to describe it in six dimensions, and then we give it access to the company’s internal information resources – primarily email inboxes and other records of communication between employees. On this basis, the AI agent will draw conclusions about the current organisational culture of the company. This will be a “painless” survey, giving immediate results and allowing continuous monitoring of cultural change. It can become an extremely valuable tool for managers, especially during times of transformation and organisational change, enabling them to monitor the impact of decisions and actions on people, their behaviour and practices.

Organisational culture has the opportunity to become even more “manageable”, which will lead to closing the so-called fit gap. Today, 90% of company leaders believe that organisational culture is important for their businesses and for building their value, but only 15% feel that organisational practices are as they should be (supporting the company’s strategy)⁷². An approach based on regularly updated data will allow for the ongoing identification of areas requiring improvement and the monitoring of the effectiveness of culture-related initiatives. In addition, AI will help interpret survey results by identifying behaviour patterns and suggesting corrective actions. This type of AI assistance will certainly be used in the future not only in cultural research – a trained agent will be able to “read” signs of employee satisfaction or engagement. It is possible that soon we will no longer have to worry about attendance, anonymity of surveys or the honesty of employee responses. However, new concerns will

⁷² How Corporate Culture Affects the Bottom Line, 2015, <https://www.fuqua.duke.edu/duke-fuqua-insights/corporate-culture>.

certainly arise – already visible on the horizon in similar situations. These will include, among other things, the reinforcement of prejudices, the confidentiality of data to which the agent will have access, and compliance with GDPR regulations. In addition, limited or zero control over how the model infers organisational culture or employee engagement will be a major risk. The black box syndrome, whose operating principles are incomprehensible to us, can be a significant barrier to successful AI implementations. For this reason, programmers who use artificial intelligence to write code later have a big problem with maintaining programmes and applications – updating and servicing them.

Digital mindset

Interest in organisational culture in the context of AI will also grow due to problems with the effectiveness of implementing this technology – 95% of companies that have collectively invested \$40 billion in AI development have not seen any returns on their investment⁷³. A common mistake is to treat AI as just another IT project, when in fact it requires not only new skills, but also changes in behaviour and practices. The current organisational culture can be a major obstacle – especially in companies that place great emphasis on how work is done; where there is a high aversion to risk and low tolerance for errors, and where there is a high level of work discipline and access to information is limited. Experimentation with AI will not be helped by the tendency to stigmatise the use of AI, which is present even in Polish schools. However, it is worth noting that the attitude of Europeans differs from that in Anglo-Saxon countries (the US and the UK). According to Ipsos⁷⁴, European markets show less fear, but also significantly less enthusiasm than the rest of the world. The challenge for Polish organisational culture is therefore not to combat panic, but to overcome the specific “wait-and-see attitude” and passivity of employees, which hinder innovation. Experts argue that the successful implementation of AI depends not only on tools, but above all on building trust, responsibility and the willingness of employees to learn⁷⁵. Managers face a difficult task: on the one hand, setting specific expectations and goals related to the adaptation of



European markets show less fear, but also significantly less enthusiasm than the rest of the world

⁷³ A. Challapally et al., The GenAI Divide. State of AI in business 2025, 2025; https://mlq.ai/media/quarterly_decks/v0.1_State_of_AI_in_Business_2025_Report.pdf.

⁷⁴ The IPSOS AI monitor 2025.

⁷⁵ A. Bernstein, How Generative AI Changes Organisational Culture, Harvard Business Review, 2023.

technology, and on the other, giving employees freedom and autonomy in choosing the best ways to accomplish tasks. Leadership in this new environment requires a digital mindset that combines technical proficiency with actual improvements in work efficiency and ensuring business effectiveness through a focus on goals and results.

A new era, new challenges

In a highly dynamic environment, an organisational culture will be needed that supports not just one strategy – which may change in short cycles – but several possible strategies. There is already talk of the need to build organisational cultures that, regardless of the direction of the company's development, will support the ability to adapt to change. In this year's *2025 Global Leadership Development Study*, 40% of respondents said that their organisations are placing even greater emphasis this year than last on building an organisation ready for change, and 52% talk about the need for a culture ready for artificial intelligence⁷⁶.

In summary, we are on the cusp of an era of *machine culture*, in which artificial intelligence is no longer just an external tool, but becomes a collaborator with whom we will interact, whom we will teach and from whom we will learn. This is a fundamental change that opens up new opportunities for diagnosing and shaping organisational cultures. It brings opportunities, but also threats. Metaphorically speaking, artificial intelligence is like a powerful wind in the sails of an organisation – it can give it unprecedented speed, but leaders cannot let go of the helm. We cannot afford the comfort of ignorance and misunderstanding of the mechanisms of algorithms, which already subtly and unobtrusively influence the shape of our organisations – through culture. If organisational cultures begin to evolve in a way that we cannot control, it will be difficult to ensure their consistency with the company's strategy.



Egbert Schram

CEO

The Culture Factor

commentary:

According to the Harvard Business Impact study (2025 Global Leadership Development Study), more than half (52%) of L&D/HR professionals say leaders in their organizations must put more focus specifically on building an AI-ready culture. So, what organizational culture characteristics are exhibited by companies best prepared for the AI revolution?

⁷⁶ M. Zaborek, 249. Harvard Study. Leadership in 2025. Faster, more flexible, closer to the future, 2025, <https://hrmaznawienie.pl/249-badanie-harvarda-przywodztwo-w-2025-szybciej-elastyczniej-blizej-przyszlosci/>.

Do they have a common denominator?

In general, whether it is about adapting to digitalization in general, or specifically becoming AI ready, organizations that thrive when it comes to learning display a clear tendency to be higher than average on three of our organizational culture dimensions.

1. More goal-oriented - just learning about new tech without being clear on how to use it in business is not as efficient, so organizations need to be clear about the use case for AI in their business. Is it to become more efficient? To become more effective? etc.
2. More professionally oriented - the more organizations tend to score higher on this dimension, the more of a learning culture they display, including learning about new technology such as AI - however, there is a caveat - becoming too professional can reduce loyalty, so an important question to ask here is to what extent leaders are successful in balancing ongoing automation and AI implementation and to what extent this creates a fear among employees that they'll be replacing themselves.
3. More open than average - to learn about new tech such as AI, and to be open to experiment with it, and importantly to discuss fears associated with it, requires an open enough culture.

In addition, knowing how to use AI has a bit of a paradox with regards to the dimension of control - you need a stricter culture to understand where/how AI can be used (e.g. automation), yet an easy enough culture to experiment with it.

How will the future of organizational culture measurement and diagnostics look like - what impact will AI have on our approaches and methods in this field?

Likely, it will offer more opportunities to offer clients a range of data collection options. Survey-based still provides the most accurate information and feels less intrusive than creating an AI plugin. Focus groups offer a more human touch. AI might enable a better option to get a „pulse” on the overall direction during a transformation process by doing things like sentiment analysis in email and Slack channels. However, I personally think that AI is not a magic pill, as a lot of office culture comes from what is not being said in emails, but spoken out loud, or placed on walls, or captured in unstructured systems.

**partner**

The Culture Factor is a partner of House of Skills, specialising in the areas of organisational culture and intercultural management. The company is a global leader in working with organisational culture, offering solutions based on Hofstede's multidimensional model – advanced tools and processes supporting diagnosis and cultural change in companies and teams. The cooperation also includes workshops on intercultural effectiveness management, based on the six-dimensional model of national culture (6D Model) developed by Prof. Geert Hofstede.



trend #5

Marzena Mazurkiewicz

Serious development

Serious development in 2026. On demographic soul-searching, development as a life project and the luxury of thinking

Competence development has been one of the foundations of corporate strategy for years, regardless of industry or scale of operation. Although the tools and language of description evolve, the need to invest in people remains unchanged. Today, however, we are on the threshold of a new era – the economy of potential, in which development is no longer just a benefit, but a condition for the survival of an organisation.

Development as a market standard and flashpoint

For today's employees, the opportunity to learn is no longer a distinguishing feature of an employer, but an expected standard. During recruitment, candidates cite development – alongside remuneration and organisational culture – as one of the three key factors determining their choice of company. Ignoring these needs has a real cost: for 35% of Generation Z, a lack of development prospects is the main reason for leaving a job after the first year⁷⁷.

This trend is confirmed by annual engagement surveys. Employees directly evaluate their organisations by asking the question: “Am I developing in this place, and if so, how much?”. The answer to this question determines the content of *employer branding* and *employee value proposition* (EVP) messages. Mentors, career paths and training programmes have become a permanent feature of market narratives, but today it is not their intensity but their usefulness and effectiveness that come to the fore.

As we *enter* the second half of the decade, Polish organisations are facing the challenge of demographic upheaval. Figuratively speaking, we are facing the “disappearance of Warsaw's workforce from the map of Poland”, i.e., according to GUS forecasts⁷⁸, a loss of 2 million workers of working age by 2030. What is more, by 2060, the population may shrink to 28.4 million with a low fertility rate (TFR 1.10), which will definitely end the era of easy recruitment and usher in the much-hyped era of the potential economy. In this new reality, a company's growth also depends on precisely unlocking the potential of the people we already have. Modern HR is no longer just a department that patches up competency gaps on an ad hoc basis. According to the directions indicated in the Deloitte *Global Human Capital Trends*

⁷⁷ Pracuj.pl, Polish Generation Z and career building. Pracuj.pl study, 2023–2025.

⁷⁸ GUS, population forecast 2023–2060.

2025/2026 report⁷⁹, the role of HR is evolving towards a talent orchestration hub. Instead of offering random training courses, we are designing an ecosystem in which development and *lifelong learning* become a natural part of life, rather than a hackneyed slogan or an additional work obligation.

Management boards are increasingly recognising the need to care for culture, wellbeing and development, not because it is “appropriate” – because slogans in company posts on LinkedIn, in job advertisements or on the corporate wall will accept anything – but because their verification by a tired employee who wakes up to life every Monday in the company corridors, individual meetings with the boss or in teamwork, does not necessarily match what was promised. Data from Gallup’s latest report, *State of the Global Workplace 2025*⁸⁰, sheds a harsh light on the state of modern organisations. Global employee engagement has fallen to 21%, generating an astronomical \$438 billion in lost productivity. The scale of waste is staggering – it is estimated that unlocking the full potential of human capital could increase global GDP by as much as \$9.6 trillion.

Poland ranks only 32nd out of 38 European countries. To put it bluntly, only 1 in 10 employees in a Polish company feels truly engaged in their work. The remaining 9 either perform the minimum of their duties or, in one in six cases (17%), actively work to the detriment of the organisation. Although 40% of us declare subjective mental well-being, daily stress and the growing distance between leaders and teams effectively block efficiency. Burnout at the top does not spare management either. Managerial engagement has fallen to 27%, with the largest declines seen in groups that are key to succession and innovation.

The modern labour market is forcing organisations to change their perspective. A strategic approach to development and learning – access to training, educational platforms and mentoring – is no longer a nice “HR benefit”, but is becoming a company insurance policy, a real advantage for the organisation and an opportunity for employees to build their careers. However, we need to redefine the concept of development: simply offering access to content is not learning – it is merely shifting responsibility onto the employee’s shoulders. In 2026, we already know that unlimited choice in the current information noise is a lack of choice (we write about this extensively in the trend *Where is the labour market heading?*).

Currently, employers are, in a sense, faced with the need to redefine the role of HR in the organisation. A role that HR has secretly dreamed of for decades. This function is evolving

⁷⁹ Deloitte, Human Capital Trends 2025/2026.

⁸⁰ Gallup, State of the Global Workplace, 2025, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx>.

towards human capital architects, which forces a fully subjective treatment of the employee. What initially looked like a recruitment crisis may, paradoxically, pave the way for a golden age: a moment when real investment in planned human development becomes one of the most important ways for an organisation to survive and succeed. It will become increasingly difficult to “buy” a ready-made, experienced employee. Human resources and development departments will be inclined to build competencies within the organisation to counteract the departure of the most valuable staff.



However, to avoid painting too rosy a picture, this process faces a serious barrier. The constant pressure for “here and now solutions” and the rapid development of AI tools mean that, paradoxically, we are spending less and less time on reliable knowledge transfer, which until now, before the era of AI, was one of the last items on the list of priorities. In the pursuit of immediate results and automation, it is easy to neglect the in-depth training of young employees, which in the long run widens the skills gap.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) report⁸¹ from December 2025, entitled *New Economy Skills: Unlocking the Human Advantage*, sheds very specific and, at times, alarming light on how the skills gap is evolving. This is no longer just a theoretical mismatch, but a phenomenon that the WEF calls a critical turning point for the global economy. The WEF points out that the skill life cycle has shortened dramatically, from 10-15 years to 3-5 years (44% of employees’ basic skills will change within 5 years). The skills gap is widening not because people have stopped learning, but because the pace at which technology (especially AI) is changing job requirements is outpacing the adaptive capabilities of traditional education systems and corporate training programmes. Traditional systems are not keeping up, hence the emphasis on *lifelong learning* and improving qualifications in practice. For example, in Poland, in several industries, including IT⁸², offers are mainly targeted at seniors (51.48%) and mid-level employees (43.73%), while there are virtually no offers for juniors due to the automation of simple tasks. The traditional “junior to senior” model is slowly breaking down because juniors have nowhere to gain experience and their tasks are beginning to be performed by AI. This raises the question: “How

⁸¹ WEF, *New Economy Skills: Unlocking the Human Advantage*, 2025, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/new-economy-skills-unlocking-the-human-advantage/>.

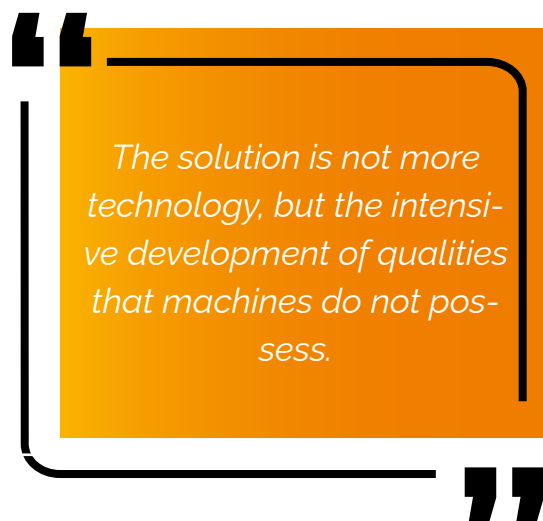
⁸² Pracuj.pl, *Polish Generation Z and Career Building. Pracuj.pl Survey, 2023–2025*.

can we design career paths for young talent (Gen Z and Alpha) when the testing ground for simple tasks is slowly disappearing?” The challenge for HR is to consider whether various personalised business simulations should become standard at the *onboarding* stage in order to artificially generate the missing experience.

The WEF⁸³ also introduces the concept of cognitive debt as the main culprit behind the growing gap in its 2025 report. What is it? Employees are increasingly using *cognitive offloading*, i.e. delegating thought processes to AI (e.g. writing reports, analysing data, making simple decisions). The result: atrophy of analytical skills⁸⁴. People become prompt operators, losing the ability to think deeply and independently. This creates a new and dangerous gap: we have tools with enormous power, but operators with increasingly poor critical thinking skills.

The current pressure to “get results here and now” also stems from the fact that we measure AI (and people) by the speed at which they generate answers, rather than by the quality of the solution to the problem. According to Deloitte’s report⁸⁵, organisations are falling into the digital hamster wheel trap – we run faster because our tools allow us to, but we don’t change direction or spend enough time asking the right questions – before, and reflecting – after.

This is where the most interesting twist comes in. Despite the ongoing development of technology, the labour market may paradoxically become more human. Since AI is currently taking over repetitive and analytical tasks, it is unique human qualities such as mentoring skills, maturity in relationships, ethics and the ability to share experience that are becoming the most valuable and difficult to replace resource. In 2026, the role of AI in the broad sense will be to take over specific tasks and stages of processes, which will not eliminate humans, but will slowly become their cognitive exoskeleton in the future. This will happen when KPIs in companies begin to reward time spent on verification and synthesis, rather than just delivering “something” in 5 seconds. An exoskeleton is designed to enhance muscle strength, not replace movement – a leader must therefore require an employee to demonstrate their thought process, to show how they



The solution is not more technology, but the intensive development of qualities that machines do not possess.

⁸³ WEF, *New Economy Skills: Unlocking the Human Advantage*, 2025.

⁸⁴ U. León-Domínguez, *Potential cognitive risks of generative transformer-based AI chatbots on higher order executive functions*, *Neuropsychology*, no. 38(4), 2024.

⁸⁵ Deloitte, *Human Capital Trends*, 2025/2026.

got to the heart of the problem. A finished file is not enough.

In summary, according to the WEF⁸⁶, the skills gap in 2025 will primarily consist of a crisis of thinking and the loss of human agency to algorithms. The solution is not more technology, but the intensive development of qualities that machines do not possess. Serious development today means a return to the fundamentals.

Day Zero: a distorted picture of fatigue

The following description deliberately uses some fictionalisation and stereotypes. We realise that every organisation, industry and team is at a different point in their journey. However, in order to understand the scale of the challenges we face in 2026, we need to look at this reality as if through a lens – slightly exaggerated to better see the cracks in the foundations of the current working model. This is the image of a clinch that we at House of Skills see in many requests for proposals: the moment when old management methods collide with the challenges faced by organisations, HR departments, managers and individuals.

Company perspective (management and business leaders): constant pressure and invisible costs

Currently, the management board's working day begins with an analysis of indicators that clearly show that profitability is under pressure and the staffing gap is widening. People from the HR department are signalling rising recruitment costs, while line managers are reporting longer project completion times. Business leaders often feel that the company is trading water because there are ideas for innovation, but there are not enough people to implement them. Decisions about investments in development are made, but with the feeling that this is another cost in the budget, not a driving force. From the management board's perspective, the day looks like an attempt to drive a car with the handbrake on. At the beginning of the year, the CEO reads reports, which are emerging in rapid succession, and knows that with each passing year, the resource problem will grow.

Companies eagerly announce “the year of innovation and AI,” but in reality, a large part of the operational directors' time is taken up by corporate meetings that could be handled by email. Management boards are aware that HR “does training,” but they do not see the impact on results. In their eyes, development is often a black box: you throw money in, certificates come out, and productivity either twitches slightly or stands completely still. They feel frustrated because they know that the world is moving on, and they are unable to unlock the potential of

⁸⁶ WEF, New Economy Skills: Unlocking the Human Advantage, 2025.

the people they already have, whose loyalty is regularly tested by competitors offering higher rates.

The perspective of the HR and development department: fighting for meaning and effectiveness

For the HR and development (L&D) department, the day is sometimes a struggle for meaning and effectiveness. At ten in the morning, the HR team looks at the learning platform *dashboard*. The login statistics are low. HR feels like a doctor prescribing vitamins to a patient who is having a heart attack. They know that people need reskilling, but they also see that managers are preventing employees from participating in workshops because they are caught up in day-to-day firefighting. The development department feels underappreciated: they have prepared great development content, but no one is reading it. HR sees what is ailing the company – they see the “biological fatigue” of the employees – but they do not have the mandate to stop the machine and say, “Stop, we need to unlearn old mistakes in order to move forward.” Their own development? Often non-existent, because they themselves are caught up in development and recruitment processes that do not bring the expected results anyway.

On the one hand, HR feels pressure from the board to “find the right people” and “train them.” On the other hand, they see that traditional training does not work. Managers complain that people do not have time to learn, and if they do get involved, the knowledge quickly evaporates. They try to introduce microlearning, AI, and coaching, but often encounter resistance or a lack of understanding. Their drawers are full of data on completed training courses, but sometimes they lack hard arguments to convince management that their actions are actually protecting the company from falling behind or demographic turmoil. They feel a bit like the mythological Cassandra – they see the problem, but find it difficult to come up with an effective solution because the company culture still favours firefighting over prevention.

This is a brutal picture of everyday life in development departments, which we at House of Skills – from the perspective of a training company – see in numerous requests for proposals. We are right in the middle of this clinch. HR departments understand what a competence “collapse” is. They put enormous pressure on us as partners to “do the same thing, but in two hours,” because no one will give us people for two days.


The manager’s perspective (middle management): caught between operations and pressure

Managers, especially at the middle level, are the real “heroes on the front line” who feel the most pressure. They are no longer the ones sending people on courses, but have become

the key link in determining whether the money and time invested in training will pay off or be forgotten after a week. Their day is a marathon. Their calendar is bursting at the seams with meetings, administrative tasks and urgent problems. They have dozens of certificates in management, feedback and communication in their drawer, but they lack the real time to implement this knowledge. As soon as they try to apply a new method, another fire breaks out, distracting them from what is strategic. Managers feel trapped – they want to develop their team because they know it is important, but they simply do not have the time. The role of the manager in the training process has changed significantly in recent years – from someone who merely approves training requests and ticks attendance boxes to a key partner who manages the process of consolidating knowledge in everyday practice. As a result, managers return to old, familiar patterns of behaviour, because they give the illusion of control in the face of chaos. They themselves feel overwhelmed with information. Expectations from above and needs from below drive internal pressure to perform perfectly in both roles.

The individual's perspective

At the end of this chain is the employee: overstimulated, tired from a series of meetings and functioning in a state of permanent distraction due to fifteen open tabs in their browser and a list of urgent tasks to be done immediately. They are accompanied by a fear of AI, which, instead of motivating them to change, paralyses their ability to learn. As a result, despite unlimited access to resources – from expert knowledge on YouTube and in business books to e-learning platforms and AI tools that synthesise data – instead of the expected agility, they develop developmental apathy. Paradoxically, employees, overwhelmed by an excess of possibilities and current responsibilities, no longer have the strength or cognitive resources to use these tools regularly and effectively. In Deloitte's *Human Capital Trends 2025* report,⁸⁷ a strong thesis is introduced: we are overwhelmed by digital debt and an excess of tools that were supposed to help. The pressure to develop often makes us treat ourselves like software that needs to be constantly updated. Hobbies become projects, and rest becomes a means of regenerating our strength for work. In addition, every free moment without productivity causes guilt, and every success is just a stop before the next goal. We



The pressure to develop often makes us treat ourselves like software that needs to be constantly updated

⁸⁷ Deloitte, Human Capital Trends, 2025/2026.

fall into a trap where development ceases to be enjoyable and begins to burn us out. It's like a treadmill.

The luxury of thinking and the neurobiology of resistance

The biggest developmental deficit of 2026 is not money, but cognitive space. During an intense conversation, it is impossible to download a new application onto a phone that has 1% battery life. It is not easy to slow down when the brain has become addicted to constantly being on the go.

Adult learning is a biological process that requires enormous energy. The adult brain acts as a filter – it only opens up to new knowledge when it sees its immediate relevance. The biggest barrier is proactive inhibition. Old habits are so strongly engraved in the neural highway that new knowledge is treated as an intruder. The process of “*unlearning*” activates the centres in the brain responsible for physical pain. The 21-day myth, stemming from a misinterpretation of Dr. Maxwell Maltz’s research, was debunked some time ago. Research by Phillippa Lally⁸⁸ (UCL) has shown that it takes an average of 66 days to achieve habit automation, and up to 254 days at most.

A luxury is an organisation that offers a protective cocoon of time, rather than holding employees accountable for a new skill on the first weekend after the course. Responsible HR should show how to cut through the noise to regain the resources employees need to build new synapses. Expensive training is not a luxury; a luxury is time for reflection after training and its proper implementation in everyday work. In practice, if the brain is busy analysing 30 notifications per hour from computer emails, phones and even watches, and dwelling on mistakes from the morning meeting, and during breaks experiences anxiety about the future or worries about everyday matters, then... it simply lacks fuel for its working memory, which has limited capacity (known as Miller’s number). Each notification is an open tab in the brain’s browser. With 50 notifications, the system crashes – it is impossible to upload new “software” (skills) because the RAM is occupied by noise. As a result, instead of developing, the brain goes into survival mode. In this mode, the priority is to “make it to the evening” rather than “change habits”.

One practical solution may be *Via Negativa*⁸⁹ (Latin for “negative way”). This is a philosophical concept popularised by Nassim Taleb, among others, according to which systems can be improved not by adding, but by removing elements. In the context of

⁸⁸ Phillippy Lally, How are habits formed: Modelling habit formation in the real world, 2009, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ejsp.674>.

⁸⁹ N. Taleb, *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*, 2012.

development, this means moving from the question: “What else do I need to learn?” to the question: “What do I need to give up in order to regain space for thinking?” Instead of looking for complex incentive systems, HR departments should first eliminate factors that demotivate employees.

Reports by Deloitte⁹⁰, Gallup and ActivTrak⁹¹ paint a picture of a world in which the average employee is distracted every 3-5 minutes. This is also confirmed by a study by Prof. Gloria Mark⁹²: employees are distracted on average every 3 minutes, change tasks every 47 seconds on screen devices, but the key factor is the so-called *switch cost*. Interestingly, it takes an average of 23 minutes and 15 seconds to regain full focus (*deep focus*) after a single distraction (e.g., checking a notification on Teams). The paradox of the situation: if you are distracted every 3 minutes and it takes 23 minutes to recover, you will not enter a state of deep focus during a standard working day and will return home with the feeling of a wasted day during which you did nothing.

23 minutes and 15 seconds – that is how long it takes on average to regain full focus (deep focus) after a single distraction (e.g., checking a notification).

The paradox of the overloaded buffet

The most striking example is the activities planned as part of budget optimisation, most often international e-learning courses from the so-called “global” concerning general procedures that “light up red” in LMS systems. This creates a cascade effect: leaders put pressure on managers, who in turn put pressure on employees to complete the courses before the end of the quarter. The knowledge contained therein is often generic, unsuited to the local market and operational realities.

The result: we associate learning with punishment and administrative duty, rather than development. The employee’s brain only learns how to get through the slides as quickly as possible in order to pass the final test by trial and error. This is a pure waste of time, which can build and reinforce aversion in organisations to any development initiatives and lead to questioning the very existence of HR departments. The more cunning ones are already using

⁹⁰ Gallup, State of the Global Workplace 2025, 2025.

⁹¹ ActivTrak, Digital distraction.

⁹² G. Mark, D. Gudith, U. Klocke, The cost of interrupted work: More speed and stress, 2008.

AI to pass these courses.

Decision paralysis

At House of Skills, we observe a phenomenon that we tentatively call “open buffet paralysis” – the illusory belief that access to an ocean of courses alone will take care of development. In reality, unlimited choice in a world of excess becomes a lack of choice, leading only to overwhelm and apathy. In 2026, we have to admit that offering access to content is not building competence, but shifting responsibility onto an already overburdened employee.

The lack of structure goes hand in hand with another problem: the creation of systemic islands of inspiration, such as prestigious Leadership Academies, which often operate in isolation from real operational challenges. Managers leave such meetings inspired by ideas of modern leadership, for example, only to return to their desks and face the brutal reality of two hundred unread emails and a cascade of urgent fires. Even a programme that has been very well prepared by HR departments will not come into effect if it does not have support from above – from leaders and managers.

As a result, a kind of developmental schizophrenia develops in organisations. In training courses, we promote empathy, strategy and the luxury of critical thinking, as described by the WEF, while reporting systems and bonuses continue to reward primarily speed of response and mindless filling in of tables. Knowledge from even the most expensive academies has no chance of surviving in a culture that rewards old, safe habits at the operational level.

The tension between forcing employees to click through useless courses and leaving them to their own devices in a sea of subscriptions results in a very specific loss that strikes at the foundations of companies:

- **Blurring of the implementation loop.** Companies generate a huge supply of knowledge, but record minimal retention of real skills. Employees theoretically know more and more about modern working methods, but in practice they operate in the same way as they did five years ago, because the system does not allow time or safe space to experiment with new knowledge.
- **Throwing money down the drain.** Organisations pay for this state of affairs twice. The first time is when they purchase mismatched training courses or expensive subscriptions that are only used by a few per cent of the most active people. The second time is when they lose out on the productivity of other employees who waste valuable time and energy on unproductive e-learning courses that do not translate into the quality of their daily work in any way.

The yo-yo effect in the development department

The HR department also struggles with a phenomenon commonly referred to as the yo-yo effect in development. We observe this at House of Skills almost every day: instead of building real competence muscles, organisations are looking for a magic pill that will change their culture in a single weekend. This is a classic *fast food* development trap. The greatest sin of today's business is the lack of discipline in applying proven methods. Organisations behave like people on a perpetual diet: every quarter, they rush to for a new, trendy methodology, hoping for instant results, while real change – like building physical fitness – requires boring, repetitive and consistent work.

Organisations and employees constantly demand new stimuli, but when it comes to daily training – i.e. applying one methodology for a minimum of 66 days (the average time necessary, according to Phillippa Lally of UCL⁹³, to develop automaticity) – their enthusiasm disappears. The here and now wins. As a result, companies throw away files with brilliant theories that no one uses, because before one method has time to take root, it is replaced by the next novelty. What do the data say?

- According to the 70/20/10 model, as much as 70% of learning takes place in practice. However, Devlin Peck (2025) shows that if, after training, a leader returns to an environment that does not allow for experimentation, 90% of the investment evaporates.
- Gallup reports (2025)⁹⁴ suggest that the search for new stimuli is often a defence mechanism used by leaders who fear for the future. Meanwhile, the team expects stability and trust from their leader above all else. Constantly changing priorities destroys both of these values, creating developmental schizophrenia within the company.

From collecting certificates to real-time competency mapping

In the old model, the HR department usually knew as much about an employee as was in their CV and annual appraisal results. In 2026, thanks to AI, HR analyses dynamic skill maps. Some organisations are already using them.

The transition from diplomas to skills (*skills-based*)

Organisations are increasingly moving away from the traditional model based on academic

⁹³ P. Lally et al., How are habits formed: Modelling habit formation in the real world, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, No. 40(6), 2025.

⁹⁴ Gallup, *State of the Global Workplace*, 2025.

degrees in favour of real skills and potential. 66% of employees say they are more attracted to companies that assess candidates on this basis. One example is Medtronic, which changed the requirements for 65 roles (half of which are in IT), abandoning the requirement for a university degree in favour of competency path certification. Companies such as the global financial services centre Standard Chartered are introducing skills passports, which use AI to match employees to specific projects based on their actual abilities beyond the job description.

Upskilling in context

Sources indicate that traditional training is giving way to learning integrated into everyday tasks. The most effective development takes place through the completion of specific tasks, which allows for the immediate application of knowledge in practice. One example is Roche, which, thanks to AI-supported personalised learning, has reduced the time it takes for engineers and specialists to become fully competent from a year and a half to just 90 days. The reinvention of learning and development (L&D) processes is identified as the most urgent need among all talent-related processes. In our backyard, Orange Polska, among others, is actively implementing *upskilling* and *reskilling* models, treating learning as the main benefit that builds a work culture.

The whole-person model

A modern approach to development, used for example by Johnson & Johnson in personalising leadership paths, goes beyond hard skills alone. Developed over more than two decades, the HR Leadership Development Programme (HRLDP), launched in 2004 as the Foundational and Experienced HR Leadership Development Programme, initially focused on business rotations and building HR competencies (2-3 years), but around 2015 it shifted to a *whole-person approach*, evolving towards deep personalisation. The company does not limit itself to evaluating hard results, but analyses work style and characteristics such as agility and curiosity. Thanks to rotational projects that are selected based on the individual aspirations and personality of the employee, Johnson & Johnson has seen a 25-30% increase in talent retention.

For the model to work, HR had to create an environment where employees were not afraid to talk about their true aspirations (even if they went beyond their current role). HR underwent intensive training in building psychological safety, among other things.

The New Deal: 360 Responsibility

This is the vision of a mature organisation that understands that in 2026, development is no

longer task-based but ecosystem-based. Success in L&D is no longer the exclusive domain of HR. It becomes a shared commitment in which each party (the company, the development department and the employee) makes a unique contribution to building the organisation's competence resilience.

Organisation: responsible for creating an ecosystem in which learning is possible

Business responsibility is shifting from financing training to optimising the work environment. The company is responsible for providing the resources without which the learning process cannot biologically take place.

- **Reclaiming space.** Actively removing information noise and unnecessary bureaucracy (so-called *work about work*) to unlock employees' cognitive resources.
- **Architecture of silence.** Formal recognition of "time for development" as high-priority business time, protected from day-to-day tasks and sudden distractions.
- **A culture of stability (*stability*).** Providing a stable process framework that allows employees to safely experiment with new tools.

HR: architects of the growth environment

HR ceased to be an administrator some time ago, but is now becoming a curator of quality and a human capital strategist. Its task is to precisely match the supply of knowledge to market needs.

- **Filtration.** Instead of an "open buffet" of content, HR provides precise, designed and verified development paths (e.g. business simulations) that really build value.
- **Protecting employability.** Guaranteeing the employee's market value growth. HR acts as an advisor, ensuring that the team's competencies do not become technological debt.
- **Designing speed to competence.** Shortening the learning curve by selecting methods that guarantee the fastest transfer of knowledge into professional practice.

Unit: a pilot who is responsible for their own agility and has the courage to take on the role of a novice

Employee responsibility is evolving towards actively managing one's own adaptability and approaching one's own development as a project. Professionalism in 2026 means a willingness to cyclically take on the role of a student.

- **Proactive unlearning.** Conscious work on breaking old patterns and habits, despite natural neural resistance.

- **Personal training discipline.** Giving up the role of a passive recipient of knowledge in favour of an active implementer who takes responsibility for consolidating new skills.
- **Novice mindset.** The courage to operate in a zone of cognitive discomfort and take responsibility for one's own "professional competence" in the age of AI.

Conclusion

The trend we now call serious development is not just a temporary response to the crisis, but above all the future of what really works in business. In a world of excess and AI pressure, this trend sets a new standard: a shift from mass retraining to precision engineering of potential.

It is not about more training courses or longer development programmes. It is about effective, targeted development based on diagnosis, matching and partnership in achieving a real return on investment. One in which personality and aptitude cease to be guesswork and become a parameter that is reliably measured and taken into account in development processes, especially in the context of managerial and leadership roles. Serious development ceases to be a declaration and becomes a conscious decision on the part of both the employer and the employee. Not "more", but "more accurately". Not "constantly", but "purposefully".

We are aware that the speeding Pendolino train with AI on board does not make the task any easier today, intensifying the sense of chaos and pressure. However, we believe that we can tame this "beast" enough to start working with it effectively. This approach protects the employer's interests, as it largely eliminates recruitment errors, reduces the risk of staff turnover, burnout and even depression resulting from a mismatch between the person and the role, and minimises the costs associated with poor personnel decisions. From a coaching perspective, we also see benefits for the individual, who, by testing and confirming their potential to play a managerial and leadership role, gains confidence that they have chosen the right career path. As a result, this promotes the development of mature leadership, which translates into team effectiveness and long-term organisational efficiency.



Kjell Lindqvist

CEO Celemi

commentary:

What truly works in experiential learning (learning by doing), and what fails despite advances in technology?

The effectiveness of experiential learning depends not on the technological sophistication

of the simulation itself, but on the level of participants' cognitive engagement. True competence development occurs when technology does not provide ready-made solutions but instead forces participants to make real business trade-offs and face their consequences in real time. A key success factor is not simply taking part in the simulation, but what happens afterward: structured dialogue and social sense-making. Technology fails in training and development when it makes tasks too easy by removing necessary intellectual effort, or when it promotes exclusively individual learning at the expense of building a shared organizational understanding of problems.

Have you observed in your data how access to AI tools changes the way participants analyze information during the simulation? Are they becoming more critical thinkers or more passive decision-makers?

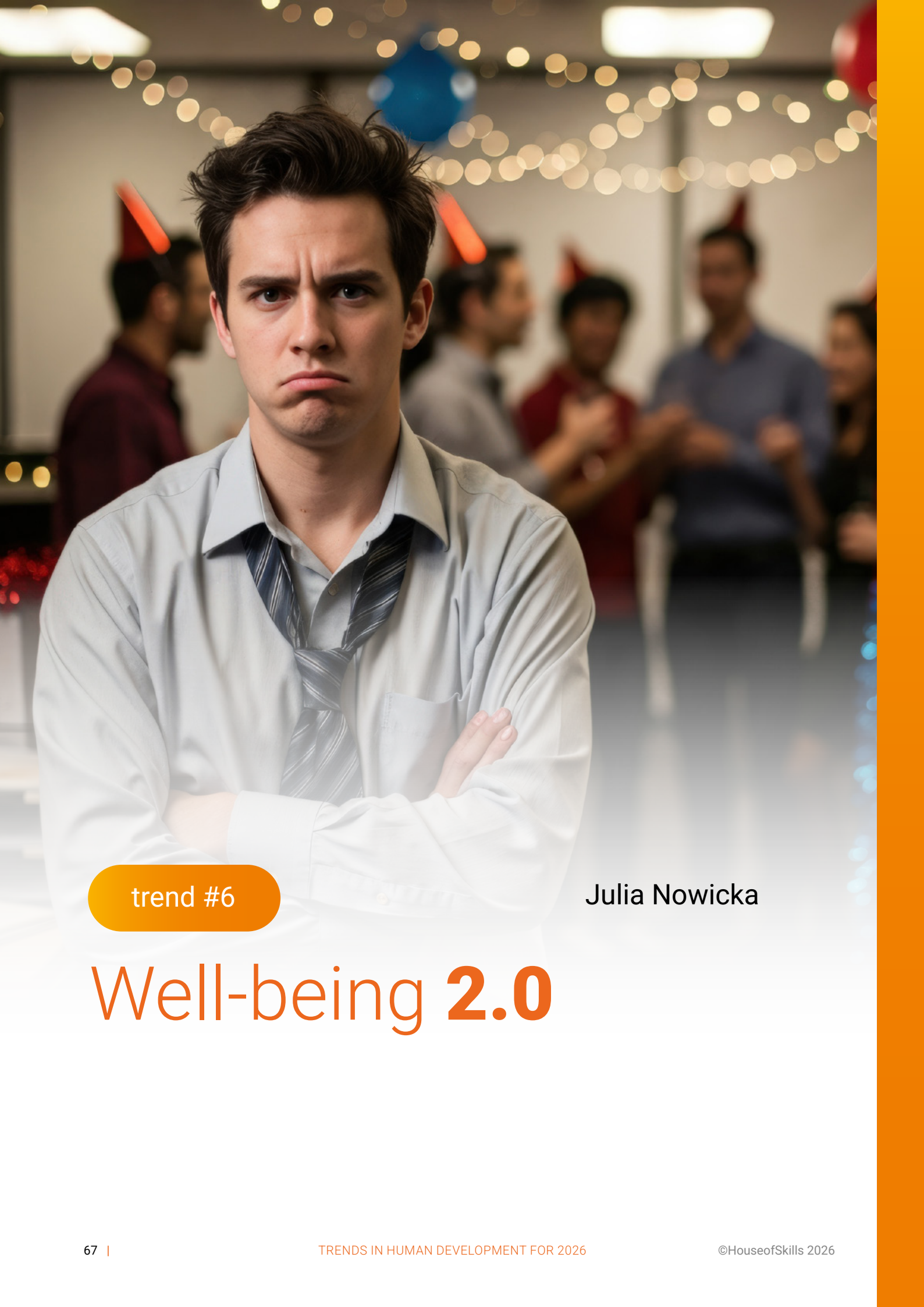
Introducing AI tools into training processes carries the risk of cognitive passivity if the system is designed as an "oracle" that provides ready answers. In such a scenario, participants make decisions faster, but their critical thinking weakens and debate over assumptions disappears. For AI to truly enhance competencies, it must act as a demanding partner—a tool that challenges the status quo, offers alternative perspectives, and pushes people to justify their choices more deeply. The foundation of modern development is the principle that AI should augment human intelligence, not replace it. If the tool eliminates the struggle associated with analysis, the process of building lasting competencies is disrupted.

Do you have data showing a correlation between performance in the simulation and subsequent real-world job performance?

The value of business simulations lies in systemic effects rather than in a simplified assessment of individuals. While isolating the impact of training on a specific employee's performance is methodologically risky, long-term market data confirms the strategic value of this method. The effectiveness of development programs is measured by the degree of adoption and the extent to which they become embedded in a company's management structures and strategy. Simulations change an organization not by improving individual parameters, but by building a common business language, improving the quality of decision-making dialogue, and breaking down silos between functions. When an organization as a whole learns to make better decisions, business growth becomes a natural consequence of a cultural shift in how work gets done.

**partner**

Celemi is a partner of House of Skills and a global leader in educational business simulations. The company specialises in engaging development solutions that teach systemic and strategic thinking about business in a practical way. Its flagship products are Celemi Enterprise™ – a simulation supporting the development of strategic management skills and a holistic view of business operations, and Celemi Apples & Oranges™ – a workshop that demonstrates business logic and finance in an accessible way, particularly valued in programmes dedicated to finance for non-financial professionals.



trend #6

Julia Nowicka

Well-being 2.0

Well-being 2.0: no more sugar-coating reality

Over the past dozen or so years, the approach to well-being in business has undergone a huge metamorphosis. The real boom in the word *well-being* began after 2010, and the pandemic only accelerated it.

The evolution of *well-being* is a process that dates back to the industrial reforms of the 19th century. As early as 1817, Robert Owen proposed a revolutionary system based on the principle of “eight hours of work, eight hours of entertainment, eight hours of rest”, which laid the foundation for future occupational health and safety standards. This thinking was continued by Henry Ford, who in 1926 introduced a five-day, 40-hour working week, justifying this decision not only by the desire to improve the quality of life of his employees, but above all by a real increase in their productivity.

In the mid-20th century, the approach to well-being began to take on a more formal character, as evidenced by the emergence of *the first employee assistance programmes* (EAPs) in the 1940s and 1950s. Initially, these programmes focused almost exclusively on solving alcohol problems in the workplace. Dr Halbert Dunn gave the movement a deeper theoretical meaning by defining *high-level wellness* as a dynamic process of maximising an individual’s potential.

A real breakthrough in the measurability of these activities came in 1979, when Johnson & Johnson launched its Live for Life® programme. It became the prototype for modern health strategies, as studies confirmed its direct impact on reducing healthcare costs and significantly reducing employee absenteeism. These results fuelled the *corporate fitness* trend in the 1980s, which focused on physical fitness as a method of reducing health risks. Another significant shift came in the early 1990s, when, under growing pressure for flexibility and the need to balance family and professional roles, the concept of *work-life balance* became a permanent fixture in mainstream human resource management.

In the 21st century, *well-being* has undergone a transformation into a powerful *employer branding* tool, symbolised by innovations introduced by Google – such as *nap pods*, free meals and extensive health packages designed to stimulate creativity and attract top talent.

The last and most radical stage of this evolution came in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic ultimately shifted the focus to mental health, making *well-being* not just a nice addition, but an integral part of companies’ strategic activities and a key component of modern ESG reporting.

The enormous scale of today’s investments in this area is directly reflected in hard market data – the global market for corporate *wellness* services (*corporate wellness*) was valued at

USD 65.25 billion in 2024⁹⁵. The latest data indicates that 2025 closed with a value of \$68.41 billion, and forecasts for the current year, 2026, predict further growth to around \$72.5 billion⁹⁶. Some research centres indicate even faster growth, estimating the market value at USD 76.52 billion as early as 2025, with the prospect of exceeding USD 80 billion in 2026⁹⁷.

The main driver of steady growth – at an average of 6% per annum (CAGR – compound annual growth rate) – is strategic investment in employee mental wellbeing, burnout prevention and the use of artificial intelligence to personalise support programmes⁹⁸. Will these billions actually translate into smiles, happiness and employee engagement?

Definition and fundamentals

Well-being is not a new trend, but a topic that has been around for a long time. As early as 1948, the World Health Organisation (WHO)⁹⁹ recognised that health is not merely the absence of disease. It is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. Today, the importance of this approach in official documents has clearly increased. In 2021, the WHO adopted *the Geneva Charter*¹⁰⁰, which calls for the creation of well-being societies. In this model, the most important goal of politics and economics is human development and caring for our planet.

The New Zealand government's announcement of a *well-being budget* in 2019 caused quite a stir. Instead of focusing solely on economic performance, Jacinda Ardern's government based government spending on five key priorities that would make a real difference to people's lives. The *Living Standards Framework* required treasury officials to analyse four types of capital: natural, human, social and financial-physical. As a result, every budget proposal had to pass the test: "How will this expenditure affect the long-term well-being of society?" After the October 2023 elections, this approach changed dramatically, and New Zealand moved away from Jacinda Ardern's idealistic model in favour of classic fiscal policy focused on savings and tax cuts. This means a change in priorities, but not a complete elimination of the achievements of previous years – some of the analytical tools still function in public administration, although they no longer serve as the main budgetary compass. Hard data and indicators have prevailed. Meanwhile, public debate openly acknowledges that caring for employees brings tangible benefits to business. Joint data from the WHO and the International Labour Organisation

⁹⁵ Fortune Business Insights, 2025.

⁹⁶ Fortune Business Insights, 2025; Grand View Research, 2025.

⁹⁷ SkyQuest Technology, 2025.

⁹⁸ Fortune Business Insights, 2025; SkyQuest Technology, 2025; McLean & Company, 2026.

⁹⁹ WHO Constitution, 1948.

¹⁰⁰ Geneva Charter for Well-being, 2021.

(ILO)¹⁰¹ show a clear result: every dollar invested in the mental health of a team brings a return of about \$4. This is due to higher employee efficiency. Investments in their mental health reduce absenteeism and boost morale.

In June 2021, the ISO standard was introduced – the world’s first standard for psychological safety and health at work, which teaches how to professionally manage risk in relationships and ensure psychological comfort at work. Established by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), it offers organisations guidelines for identifying and managing psychosocial risks as part of their health and safety system. According to this standard, *well-being* is not just about additional benefits. It is about systematically caring for the needs of employees and building a safe work culture.

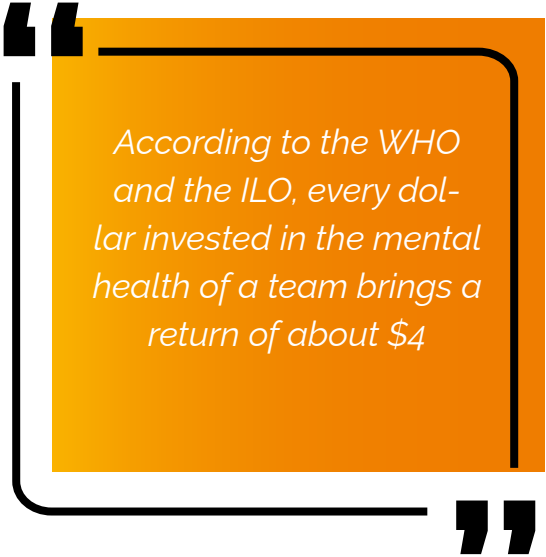
Why is this so important? In her book *The Fearless Organisation: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth*, researcher Amy Edmondson explains that psychological safety is crucial in today’s knowledge-based economy. Companies where employees are afraid to admit mistakes usually lose out. On the other hand, where people do not have to hide their mistakes, the whole team learns faster and works better.

What really affects employee wellbeing?

The latest research points to several factors that have a real impact on employee well-being. These include flexibility, *job crafting*, social relationships and, more importantly, the relationship with the manager.

Work organisation and flexibility

Research conducted by Gretchen Spreitzer¹⁰² in 2017 showed that the ability to decide on the schedule and location of work is a key factor in well-being. Several years earlier, it had already been proven that workplace flexibility is associated with greater job satisfaction¹⁰³, and in



According to the WHO and the ILO, every dollar invested in the mental health of a team brings a return of about \$4

¹⁰¹ WHO and ILO, Mental health at work, 2022.

¹⁰² G. Spreitzer, *Alternative Work Arrangements: Two Images of the New World of Work*, 2017.

¹⁰³ Possenriede & Plantenga, *Temporal and Locational Flexibility of Work, Working-Time Fit, and Job Satisfaction*, 2014, <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/102343/1/dp8436.pdf>.

2021 it was confirmed that this type of organisation helps to attract talent¹⁰⁴. Interestingly, some evidence suggests that the conflict between work and family life may intensify when employees work from home¹⁰⁵.

Fit and job crafting

Long before the pandemic, research showed (in line with intuition) that well-being increases when job requirements match an employee's knowledge, strengths and needs (known as *job fit*¹⁰⁶), but even with a poor fit, employees can improve their well-being through *job crafting*, i.e. independently redefining tasks to better suit their preferences and skills¹⁰⁷.

Employees are not merely passive executors of orders – they have real power to shape their work environment. Changes can affect the tasks themselves, the way they are performed, and relationships with other people in the company. This approach allows employees to find deeper meaning and fulfilment in their work, which directly translates into greater motivation and better results.

Social relationships

Research confirms that the awareness of being included, accepted and valued has a strong impact on one's sense of well-being. Toxic environments, on the other hand, effectively destroy it¹⁰⁸.

Relationship with the manager

The evolution of well-being in 2026 places interpersonal relationships at the centre of business strategy. They act as a filter through which employees experience organisational culture. The key link in this process is the immediate supervisor, on whom as much as 70% of the team's level of engagement depends. Research shows that the quality of the relationship with the manager has a decisive impact on the well-being of team members. Employees report higher levels of well-being when they perceive their leader as fair and supportive. On the other hand,

¹⁰⁴ 10 T. Warren, Work–life balance and gig work: 'Where are we now' and 'where to next' with the work–life balance agenda?, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00221856211007161>.

¹⁰⁵ 11 M. Antino, P. Ruiz-Zorrilla, A. I. Sanz-Vergel, J. M. Leon-Perez, The role of job insecurity and work–family conflict on mental health evolution during COVID-19 lockdown, 2022.

¹⁰⁶ 12 G. R. Slemp, M. L. Kern, D. A. Vella-Brodrick, The role of job crafting and autonomy support. *Psychology of Well-Being*, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ E. I. Lysova, P. G.W. Jansen, S. N. Khapova, J. Plomp, M. Tims, Examining calling as a double-edged sword for employability, 2018.

¹⁰⁸ S. F. Rasool, M. Wang, M. Tang, A. Saeed, J. Iqbal, How Toxic Workplace Environment Effects the Employee Engagement: The Mediating Role of Organizational Support and Employee Wellbeing, 2021.

a lack of clarity regarding the boundary between professional and private life and a mismatch with the manager's expectations in this regard becomes a major source of work-family conflict. This is why modern companies increasingly view management as the "first line of support," investing in their mental health support skills, which helps build resilience across the entire organisation.

Equally important for mental health is the overall social environment within the company, which determines both daily satisfaction ratings and emotional experiences at work. The awareness of being an included, accepted and valued member of the team is the strongest driver of well-being. The opposite of this model are environments dominated by negative social connections, which lead to the development of a toxic work culture that effectively blocks the potential of employees. In the era of hybrid work, digital loneliness is also becoming a challenge, affecting as many as one in four remote workers and weakening their emotional attachment to the company. Creating space for building authentic bonds is no longer just an integration activity, but has become an essential tool for preventing systemic burnout and apathy. We write more about this phenomenon in the *Leadership Crisis* trend.

The state of well-being in the European Union and Poland

What does *well-being* look like in the European Union and Poland? The average well-being score among Europeans is almost 70 out of 100 points according to the WHO-5 index. The youngest employees and those working beyond retirement age have the highest levels of well-being. Men rate their well-being slightly higher (70.6 points out of 100) than women (68 points). If we look only at the average, most people believe that work does not affect their health. However, in industries such as transport and healthcare, one in three people feel the negative effects of work.

Algorithmic management is a new technological challenge for well-being. It involves technology distributing tasks and controlling employee performance. This already affects 35.4% of people in the transport sector. Excessive control by algorithms is becoming a new threat because it causes severe stress and deprives people of a sense of influence over their own work.

Currently, the average level of wellbeing among Poles is 4.9 out of 10 points, and as many as 47% of people are at the so-called equilibrium point, which means they are highly susceptible to a sudden deterioration in their mental health. Although Polish employees are motivated, their peace of mind is marred by uncertainty about their earnings. Almost one in five Poles (19.9%) cannot predict their income for the next three months, which is worse than the EU average (15%). Characteristically, Poles would like to retire at an average age of 61.1,

which is one of the lowest figures in the EU, suggesting a strong need for a break from working life.

Crises and the well-being paradox

Although companies are investing billions in *well-being*, a phenomenon known as the workplace well-being paradox is emerging. It reflects the discrepancy between employers' spending on apps or training and the actual low level of well-being experienced by people. Some studies¹⁰⁹ have not confirmed that popular *well-being* apps or mindfulness training effectively improve mental health on a large scale. William Fleming's work, based on a sample of 46,336 employees from 233 British organisations, challenges the entire *corporate wellness* sector, which is worth billions of dollars. The author suggests that instead of attempting to 'fix' employees with apps, companies should focus on structural changes:

- improving work culture,
- reducing task overload,
- increasing employee autonomy.

The study indicates that responsibility for mental health is often wrongly shifted onto the individual (so-called individualisation of the problem), while the source of stress lies in the work system.

Organisational crises and burnout

Instead of fixing structural flaws in work systems, organisations often focus on "fixing" the employee, thereby masking the real sources of stress. This approach, combined with the alarmingly low level of well-being among Poles, creates fertile ground for growing crises and mass burnout, making our labour market extremely fragile. Income insecurity combined with the enormous scale of *change fatigue* creates a direct path to systemic burnout. Currently, as many as 70% of organisations admit that they have a problem with change management¹¹⁰. The situation is exacerbated by digital loneliness. According to Gallup data¹¹¹, the problem affects 20% of employees worldwide, and among remote workers, this percentage increases by another five percentage points. The lack of physical presence and weakened interpersonal bonds cause employees to lose their emotional anchorage in the company. Isolation drastically reduces

¹⁰⁹ W.J. Fleming (2023), Employee well-being outcomes from individual-level mental health interventions: Cross-sectional evidence from the United Kingdom, *Industrial Relations Journal* 2024.

¹¹⁰ Deloitte, Global Human Capital Trends, 2024, <https://www.deloitte.com/pl/pl/services/consulting/research/human-capital-trends-2025.html>.

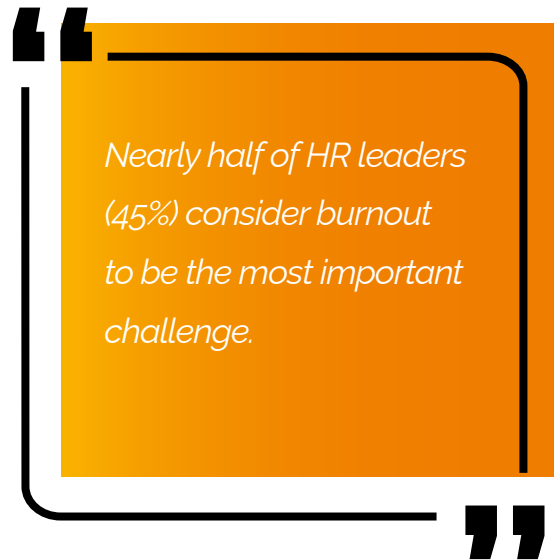
¹¹¹ Gallup, State of the Global Workplace, 2024/2025.

loyalty – it is easier to leave an organisation that is perceived only as an interface on a screen rather than a community of people.

This deficit in relationships is compounded by mental overload due to the pace of change. In Polish literature on the subject, these symptoms are precisely defined as apathy and resignation. As indicated in the McLean & Company report¹¹², only 15% of employees declare that they are free from these feelings. This means that the overwhelming majority (85%) function in a state of permanent transformational fatigue.

Nearly half of HR leaders (45%)¹¹³ consider burnout to be the most important challenge. It is estimated that the lack of attention to mental health costs the global economy as much as \$2.5 trillion annually. 83% of HR leaders expect that retaining talent will be even more difficult in 2026.

Alarming data on the condition of management staff is confirmed by the *DDI Global Leadership Forecast 2025* report, which covers almost 50 countries, including Poland. Statistics show a 71% increase in stress, only 30% of time spent on real tasks, and the fact that 40% of leaders are considering leaving their jobs. Although these are global averages, the situation in our country is almost identical. Polish analyses (including Hays and GFKM 2025) indicate the same level of overload and exhaustion among management staff. As a result, instead of being a pillar of stability in the company, leaders themselves become the group most vulnerable to crisis.



What are companies doing in the face of the crisis?

Examples from around the world

Modern *well-being* often means specific work systems, ensuring comfort at work and preventing cognitive overload (Microsoft research shows that on average, an employee receives 270 emails a day). Let's take a look at how some companies approach *well-being*, focusing on the

¹¹² McLean & Company, HR Trends Report 2026 Leading Through Change: Human-Centric and Future-Ready, 2025, <https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/ss/hr-trends-report-2026>.

¹¹³ Blanchard, 2026 HR / L&D Trends Survey: Turning Uncertainty Into Opportunity, 2026, <https://resources.blanchard.com/ebooks/2026-hr-l-d-trends-report>.

positive impact on people and work.

The Australian company Medibank has introduced a 100:80:100 model, in which employees receive 100% of their salary for 80% of their working time, provided they maintain full productivity. By eliminating unnecessary meetings, employees “regain” one day a week for rest. The results of this experiment, conducted on a group of over 500 people, are clear: mental well-being increased by 9.2% and the number of conflicts between work and private life decreased by 31%¹¹⁴.

The DPG Media media group applies the 80/20 rule, planning tasks for only 80% of the team’s capacity. The remaining 20% is a deliberate time buffer for learning, innovation or urgent repairs, which prevents work paralysis at full capacity¹¹⁵. Salesforce has adopted a similar strategy, promoting a culture of regeneration through, among other things, additional days off and “meeting-free Thursdays”, which provide space for peaceful work and concentration. Research by the Future Forum association confirms that this approach works: people who have the freedom to decide when to take breaks are more than twice as good at focusing on tasks than employees working in rigid structures¹¹⁶.

In Poland

There are few sources on the situation in Poland. Results from the GFKM survey confirm that companies are increasingly supporting the mental health of their employees. Contemporary Polish companies perceive management as the “first line of support” in the area of well-being, as evidenced by the fact that 35% of organisations implement mental health support training for managers. Although in the overall ranking they are less popular than team-building meetings (66%) or webinars (40-45%), their strategic importance exceeds more passive forms of assistance, such as medical packages with a psychologist (18%) or dedicated online platforms (23%). This need is particularly strong in the service sector (47%) and in medium and large companies, which is a direct response to real challenges: almost every second leader recognises a mental health crisis in their team, and 34% of managers have experienced psychological difficulties in the last two years. In this context, educating leaders is no longer just a benefit, but an essential tool for building organisational resilience, enabling management to respond effectively to their subordinates’ problems while taking care of their own emotional

¹¹⁴ Medibank Newsroom, 4 Day Week Global, 2024

¹¹⁵ Deloitte, Human Capital Trends 2025, 2025, <https://www.deloitte.com/pl/pl/services/consulting/research/human-capital-trends-2025.html>.

¹¹⁶ Salesforce Wellness Playbook, Future Forum, The Leader’s Guide to Work-Life Integration, <https://www.salesforce.com/resources/guides/wellness-playbook-work-life-balance-guide/>.

resources. It would be advisable to consider taking care of HR employees, who also often have to face problems in the face of their employees' mental health crises.

In Poland, there is still talk of building resilience and teaching people how to deal with their emotions, although there are also signs of change and attempts at a proactive approach, according to which it is necessary not only to teach resilience to existing difficult working conditions, but also to ensure a change in the framework of the employee's functioning. For example, there is increasing talk of physically transforming the working environment, as confirmed by data from leading consulting firms. In its analysis, *The Office of the Future – 5 Years After the Pandemic and Outlook for the Coming Years*¹¹⁷, JLL clearly points to a shift away from traditional *open-plan* layouts in favour of dedicated *well-being rooms and regeneration zones*, emphasising that modern *high-end offices in Poland* are increasingly being designed with a conscious reduction of stimuli that negatively affect the nervous system. *-being rooms and regeneration zones*, emphasising that modern *high-end offices in Poland* are increasingly designed to consciously reduce stimuli that have a negative impact on the nervous system. In the context of the increasingly raised issue of taking into account the needs of non-neurotypical people, this seems justified.

This strategy also makes economic sense. A CBRE study entitled *Does Well-Being Pay Off?* provides hard evidence of the return on investment (ROI) in well-being. According to analysts at CBRE's, a properly designed work environment that includes quiet zones and health-supporting technologies can translate into a real increase in employee productivity ranging from 10% to as much as 30%. At the same time, modern resilience is becoming increasingly inclusive, as illustrated by a groundbreaking Polish report prepared by Hays and the Kulczyk Foundation, *Invisible at work (Menopause without taboo)*. The data reveals that nearly 70% of respondents expect employers to introduce systemic solutions to support women during menopause, and ignoring this need leads to a painful loss of valuable talent from the *silver generation* (people aged 50+), who form the expert foundation of many organisations. The actions of companies in Poland are in line with global trends. The WEF 202e report indicates that currently as many as 42% of organisations are planning or already implementing DEI priorities aimed at older employees (over 55 years of age).

There is a clear discrepancy in the area of non-wage benefits in Poland. Sports cards (71%) and insurance (58%) are standard, but flexible working, which is provided by only 33% of organisations, is a bone of contention. Only 22% of employers offer psychological support¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ J. Zieliński, *Offices of the future – 5 years after the pandemic and prospects for the coming years*, JLL, <https://www.jll.com/pl-pl/insights/biura-przyszlosci-5-lat-po-pandemii-i-perspektywy-na-nadchodzace-lata>.

¹¹⁸ Hays Poland, *Salary Report 2026, 2026*, <https://www.hays.pl/raport-placowy>.

Conclusions

The key trend for 2026 is therefore the redefinition of the role of the employer. The focus is on systemic changes, such as increasing autonomy, reducing workloads and introducing innovative working models. Examples include solutions that were once considered radical, such as the 100:80:100 model, which provides full pay for 80% of working time, or task planning with a 20% buffer for regeneration and innovation. At the same time, we are seeing a trend towards “radical inclusiveness” and precise planning of activities for specific groups.

Well-being is becoming a hard metric reported under ESG, but it must be based on systemic changes in work organisation and managers equipped with the right skills. True transformation occurs where the sugar-coating of reality ends and real investment in a work culture based on a healthy pace and leaders who can manage people’s energy, not just their time, begins. In 2026, will we dare to admit that ‘Fruit Thursdays’ were just a band-aid applied to a bad work culture?

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