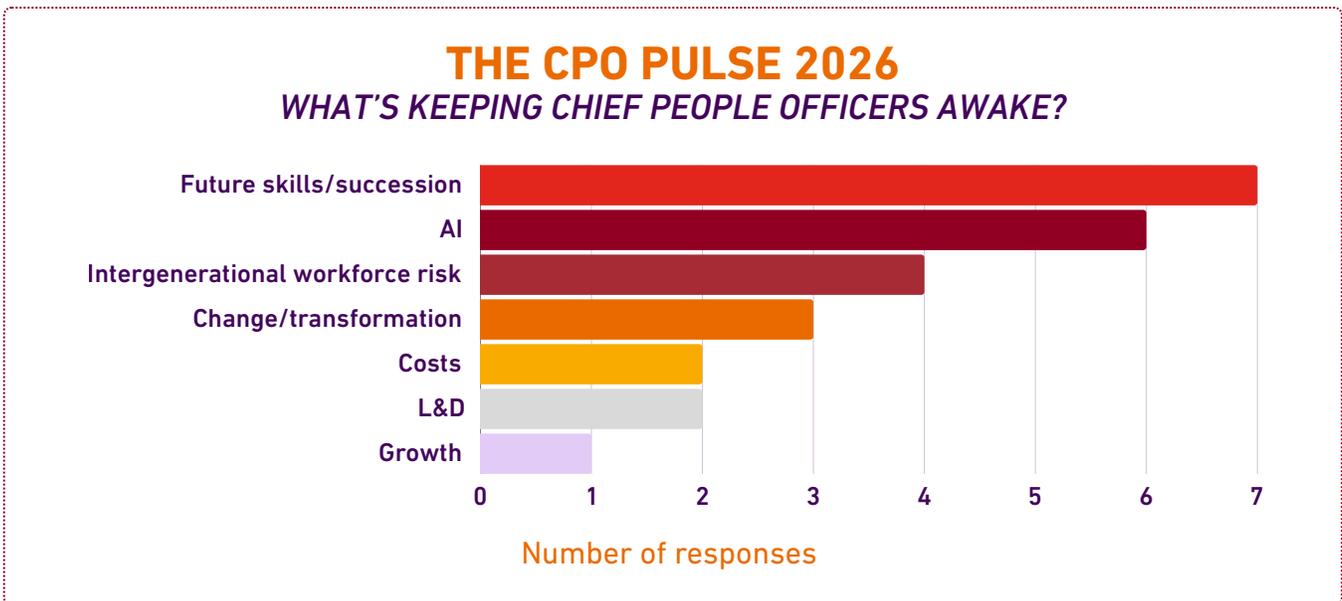


Chief People Officers are navigating significant disruption across talent, leadership, technology and workforce models.

Savannah Group asked **25 Chief People Officers** about the number one issue keeping them awake at night.

Their responses highlight five consistent workforce imperatives for HR leaders: talent scarcity, AI-driven change, succession risk, the future of employment, and cost pressure.



01 TALENT & SKILLS SHORTAGES REMAIN THE TOP HR PRIORITY

Securing critical skills is the most urgent challenge facing HR leaders today. Organisations are struggling to attract and retain both digital capability and leadership talent, while AI and offshoring continue to reshape entry-level roles and talent pipelines.

“Talent is the biggest thing that keeps me awake right now! Not having the people in the business to deliver the plan.”

KEY FOCUS FOR 2026

Building sustainable workforce capability and closing the skills gap.

ACTIONS TO STAY AHEAD

- 🕒 Audit capability gaps across critical roles
- 🕒 Invest in reskilling and internal mobility
- 🕒 Strengthen partnerships with education and early talent networks



02 AI IS TRANSFORMING WORKFORCE PLANNING AND RECRUITMENT

AI is rapidly changing how organisations hire, structure roles and plan for future capability. Many HR leaders feel pressure to lead AI adoption proactively rather than react once decisions are already made.

“HR needs to be on the front foot of technology and AI, shaping the agenda, not receiving the decisions.”

KEY FOCUS FOR 2026

Embedding AI and HR technology into workforce strategy with strong governance.

ACTIONS TO STAY AHEAD

- 🕒 Pilot AI-enabled recruitment and workforce tools
- 🕒 Upskill leaders on AI opportunities and limitations
- 🕒 Align technology strategy with broader people planning

03 INTERGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE RISK

AI and automation are accelerating the disappearance of traditional entry-level roles, while education systems struggle to keep pace with changing skill demands. HR leaders are increasingly concerned about how future generations will access meaningful employment — and what this means for long-term talent pipelines, social mobility, and organisational sustainability.

“The ladder into work is changing fast. If junior roles disappear, how do we develop future leaders — and what happens to the next generation coming through?”

KEY FOCUS FOR 2026

Protecting future talent pipelines while redesigning early-career pathways for an AI-enabled world.

ACTIONS TO STAY AHEAD

- 🕒 Reimagine early-career roles to combine human capability with AI augmentation
- 🕒 Build alternative entry routes through apprenticeships, internships and skills-based hiring
- 🕒 Partner with education providers to shape future-ready curricula
- 🕒 Invest in structured development for junior talent to accelerate readiness
- 🕒 Map long-term workforce needs to emerging generational capability



04 LEADERSHIP & SUCCESSION PLANNING IS A BUSINESS CONTINUITY IMPERATIVE

Succession planning is becoming more complex as executive roles broaden and capability requirements evolve. Building bench strength is now essential to reduce risk and accelerate growth.

“Derisking ourselves and accelerating growth through developing bench strength, whilst juggling costs in a continuing soft market. The constant conundrum!”

KEY FOCUS FOR 2026

Strengthening leadership pipelines and future-ready succession plans.

ACTIONS TO STAY AHEAD

- 🕒 Map future leadership needs to business strategy
- 🕒 Develop cross-functional leadership capability
- 🕒 Review succession regularly at Board and Executive level

05 THE FUTURE OF WORK REQUIRES NEW EMPLOYMENT MODELS

Flexible, agile and technology-enabled workforce models are no longer optional. HR leaders are redefining roles, culture and ways of working to integrate both human and digital labour.

“The future of employment — skills, roles, ways of working — it’s both the macro and micro levels.”

KEY FOCUS FOR 2026

Designing workforce models fit for the future of employment.

ACTIONS TO STAY AHEAD

- 🕒 Redesign roles for agility and collaboration
- 🕒 Invest in culture as a commercial lever
- 🕒 Accelerate future skills development through learning partnerships

06 COST PRESSURE IS FORCING HR LEADERS TO PRIORITISE INVESTMENT

HR leaders are balancing transformation demands with relentless budget constraints. The focus is shifting toward initiatives that deliver measurable return while protecting critical talent and capability.

“Huge pressure on cost everywhere. Trying to please our customers, whilst also balancing the books.”

KEY FOCUS FOR 2026

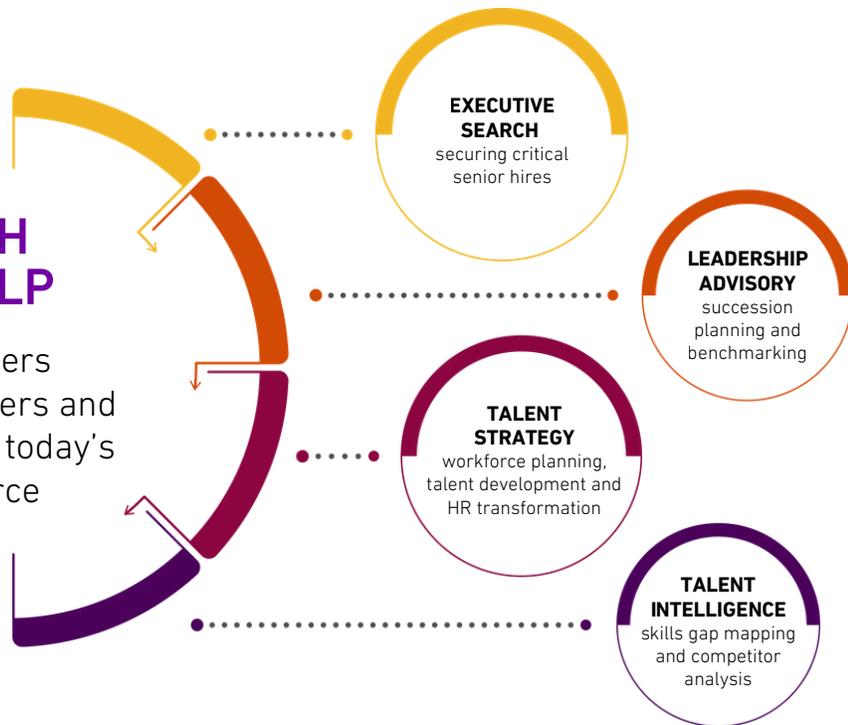
Maximising ROI on talent investment while sustaining growth.

ACTIONS TO STAY AHEAD

- 🕒 Prioritise high-impact talent initiatives
- 🕒 Use workforce analytics to drive efficiency
- 🕒 Build agile workforce planning cycles that adapt to market change

HOW SAVANNAH GROUP CAN HELP

Savannah Group partners with Chief People Officers and HR leaders to address today’s most pressing workforce challenges through:



To discuss your talent and workforce priorities for 2026, please contact:

Ali Palmer | Katie Chevis | Rachel Clark

