

# Balancing innovation and the human experience

Insights from HR Connect 2024  
on technology's role in shaping  
the future of work

# Harnessing the power of technology while keeping the human touch

How can HR leaders leverage cutting-edge technology, such as AI and cloud-based platforms, while ensuring that the human experience remains at the forefront?

This was the central question at HR Connect 2024 in Sydney, where the future of workforce management took shape through a day filled with insights, innovation, and vibrant discussions. The event gathered HR, Finance, and IT professionals eager to explore how new technologies are reshaping employee experiences, improving engagement, and driving organisational success.

Attendees left with more than just knowledge – they built meaningful connections, heard diverse perspectives, and gathered fresh, actionable ideas to implement in their organisations. From AI integration to leadership collaboration, the event offered practical solutions to meet the evolving demands of modern HR.

## Key themes from HR Connect 2024

**Keynotes panels, and breakout sessions on the role of AI and cloud technology in transforming HR processes.**

**Discussions on how AI is not only automating tasks but also empowering employees to work smarter, grow faster, and thrive in future-ready teams.**

**Real-world examples of how technology is helping organisations foster leadership, drive continuous learning, and cultivate employee engagement.**

But the event was not just about technological advancements. Attendees gained actionable strategies that combined technology with the essential human element. From streamlining recruitment to improving performance management, the conversations were rooted in practical applications that could be taken back to their organisations.

## Embracing the future of HR AI, employee engagement, and leadership at the core

Throughout HR Connect 2024, three major themes emerged as driving forces behind the future of HR. AI and automation are transforming HR functions by streamlining processes, reducing manual tasks, and freeing HR teams to focus on strategic initiatives. Meanwhile, organisations are reimagining their Employee Value Proposition (EVP) through technology, enhancing employee engagement with tools like continuous learning platforms and real-time feedback systems. Finally, strong leadership is key to ensuring the success of these transformations, with CIOs, CHROs, and CEOs working together to guide HR's evolution through effective change management and collaboration.

Let's explore how these themes – AI and automation, employee engagement, and leadership – are reshaping HR.





## AI and automation in HR

### Unlocking efficiency and empowerment

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) has radically transformed HR processes, offering solutions that were once unimaginable. At HR Connect 2024, a key focus was how AI is streamlining recruitment, performance management, and employee engagement. The insights shared throughout the sessions provided a glimpse into how businesses are leveraging AI to augment human potential, making HR teams more agile and effective in their roles.

#### Insights and Trends

As AI becomes increasingly integrated into the workplace, organisations are experiencing the benefits of automated systems that relieve HR professionals from time-consuming tasks. The most forward-thinking companies are already reaping the rewards. AI is enabling faster decision-making, improving recruitment processes, and enhancing employee engagement, all while reducing costs.

Leisl Yearsley, CEO of aKin, emphasised the critical role AI is playing in today's HR landscape, particularly as companies strive to optimise their workflows. Yearsley's session, "Beyond the Hype: Insights from 20 Years Working in AI", highlighted that while **AI cannot replace human intuition, it enhances human capabilities** by taking over mundane tasks, allowing HR professionals to focus on strategic initiatives.

The success of AI in automating routine tasks and improving employee experiences was underscored across multiple sessions. From recruitment automation to AI-powered decision-making tools, speakers emphasised that AI is not a threat to jobs but a tool to enhance human work.

“AI gives us the ability to free up humans to do quality higher-value work, moving beyond repetitive tasks. The more we integrate AI, the more we can unlock human potential in HR.”

Leisl Yearsley  
CEO & Founder, aKin

# New approach to hiring using AI: Optus Case Study

## Challenge

Optus faced significant delays in its recruitment process, particularly during the early stages of candidate interaction. The company's manual processes were time-consuming and required HR teams to handle a large volume of repetitive tasks, which slowed down recruitment and impacted overall efficiency.

## Solution

Optus partnered with Paradox AI to implement a conversational AI assistant, Career Mate, designed to streamline candidate interactions. This AI-driven solution automated much of the early-stage recruitment, including answering candidate queries and scheduling interviews, allowing HR staff to focus on more strategic initiatives.

“We wanted to enable all businesses to spend less time with software and more time with people. Our AI handles the boring, manual tasks, leaving recruiters to focus on having meaningful conversations with qualified candidates.”

David Harden  
Senior VP Client Success, Paradox AI

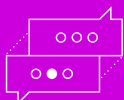
## Results



95% completion rate for interview scheduling within two hours.



Candidate application times reduced from 15 minutes to under four minutes, with interview scheduling time cut from three days to nine seconds.



40% of candidate conversations occurred outside of normal business hours, creating a seamless 24/7 engagement experience.

## AI in action

- Only 11% of organisations currently use AI to automate HR processes, despite 97% reporting positive business impacts after AI implementation.
- Optus reduced the time to apply for candidates from 15 minutes to under four minutes, and interview scheduling was reduced from three days to nine seconds.
- 40% of candidate conversations with Optus' AI assistant occur outside of normal business hours, offering a seamless, 24/7 engagement experience.

## Key takeaway

AI is advancing quickly, and its potential to transform HR processes is becoming clearer with each success story. As highlighted in the sessions, the true power of AI lies in its ability to augment human work, enabling HR professionals to focus on strategic initiatives and improve the overall employee experience. It elevates human potential by freeing workers from the burden of mundane tasks, empowering them to achieve more rather than replacing them. The future of HR is about leveraging AI to enhance, not diminish, human contributions.



# Improving the employee experience

## Driving engagement through technology

At HR Connect 2024, discussions around employee engagement and learning took centre stage, with organisations showcasing how they're refining their Employee Value Propositions (EVPs) to deeply resonate with their workforce. Leaders shared strategies on how technology plays a key role in ensuring that EVPs remain relevant, personal, and connected to broader organisational values and goals.

### Insights and Trends

A key theme was the ability of technology to help HR leaders align their EVP with business strategy while catering to the diverse needs of their employees. Several leaders illustrated how they've used technology to drive employee engagement, monitor satisfaction, and maintain a consistent experience across various locations.

At WA Transport, the challenge of engaging a geographically dispersed workforce was addressed through strategic use of feedback tools.

Meanwhile, at Gilbert + Tobin, technology has played a key role in reshaping their EVP to better support employee development and engagement.

“ We try really hard to engage with our people from a humanistic perspective, where technology seamlessly enables rather than drives engagement for us. We focus on human emotion and how people come to work for us, making sure technology supports that.”

Isabeau Korpel  
Executive Director of People and Culture, WA Transport

“ We've had to clarify our EVP around development and training, positioning the firm as a place where employees can become the best in their field. It's about making work easier for people, improving processes, and implementing solutions that support the way they work.”

Aviva Leitch  
Head of Business Transformation, Gilbert + Tobin

# Fostering a culture of self-directed learning using Workzone: Laing O'Rourke Case Study

## Challenge

Laing O'Rourke needed a solution to engage a dispersed workforce in learning and development. Traditional methods didn't cater to the fast-paced construction industry, with employees struggling to find time for lengthy training sessions, especially those working on-site.

## Solution

Laing O'Rourke implemented SAP SuccessFactors Workzone, creating the LOR Learn platform to deliver bite-sized, on-demand learning. This self-directed approach empowered employees to engage with learning content when it suited them, making the system accessible to both office-based and on-site staff.

“Thanks to SuccessFactors Workzone, we were able to establish a digital front door that everybody had a key to. And once inside, we built a floor plan that integrates all systems and allows workers to access learning whenever they want. It needed to be self-directed, bite-sized, and relevant. And that's exactly what we've got. ”

Helen Fraser  
Director of People, Laing O'Rourke

## Results



700 employees now access LOR Learn per month, compared to just 79 before the change.



The platform offers 160 learning pathways and 400 custom learning assets.



LinkedIn Learning utilisation surged from 35% to 95%.

“It's really about putting learning in the hands of the workforce. They access it when and where they need it, and it's helping us stay agile. ”

Justine Macrae  
Head of Learning, Talent, and Leadership Development,  
Laing O'Rourke

## Learning in action

- 83% of organisations using SAP SuccessFactors reported higher employee engagement scores within six months of implementation.
- Companies that offer self-directed learning tools saw a 40% increase in employee retention.
- 76% of employees feel more satisfied in roles that allow them to engage in self-directed learning and development.

## Key takeaway

Technology plays a crucial role in building an effective EVP by supporting continuous learning, personalising employee experiences, and fostering engagement. Tools like SAP SuccessFactors and Workzone are empowering organisations to create scalable, flexible solutions that meet the needs of a diverse workforce, driving both individual development and business success.



# Leadership and HR transformation

## Guiding change through collaboration and technology

Strong leadership is essential in driving HR transformation, particularly when implementing new technologies like AI and cloud-based platforms. As part of this monumental and generational shift towards tech-supported human resource solutions, many of the sessions at HR Connect took a look at the role of executive collaboration and leadership in ensuring successful HR transformations. These discussions showcased how leaders not only facilitate the adoption of technology but also manage the human side of change, ensuring that the workforce is prepared, engaged, and aligned with the organisation's goals.

### Insights and Trends

A recurring theme throughout these sessions was the pivotal role that leadership plays in guiding the successful adoption of new HR technologies. Leadership teams, particularly the C-suite, must navigate both the technical aspects of these transformations and the associated cultural changes. Technology alone can't guarantee success; it requires strong governance, change management strategies, and executive sponsorship to ensure lasting value.

The "Enhancing CIO, CHRO, and CEO Collaboration in HR Transformation" session provided key insights into how leadership can guide these transitions. Cameron Kerr, CEO of Taronga Conservation Society Australia, highlighted that it's not just about the technology, but how the leadership team aligns their efforts to foster innovation and keep employees motivated during significant changes.

Kathleen Stubbs, Regional Director, Information Technology Asia Pacific at Colliers, focused on how the collaboration between CIOs and CHROs helps bridge the gap between business objectives and the technical implementation of systems like AI and HR platforms. This teamwork ensures that new technology isn't just implemented for its own sake, but is aligned with the organisation's broader strategic goals.

“ As a CEO, my role is to set the vision and be the champion for change, ensuring that even during the tough times, we keep the energy up and focus on the future. ”

Cameron Kerr  
CEO, Taronga Conservation Society Australia

“ We need to align and act as interpreters, ensuring that IT systems meet leadership's goals while making processes simple and effective for end-users. It requires a collaborative team that listens and stays aligned from the start, ensuring we reach the desired outcome without any missteps along the way. ”

Kathleen Stubbs  
Regional Director, Information Technology Asia Pacific, Colliers

# Aligning change management with technology integration: Komatsu Case Study

## Challenge

Komatsu Australia's outdated HR systems were hindering its ability to streamline processes such as recruitment, performance management, and employee engagement. The company needed to overhaul its HR infrastructure while managing the significant change that a new system would bring.

## Solution

Komatsu transitioned to SAP SuccessFactors, a cloud-based HR platform that now serves as the backbone of its HR processes. The transformation was guided by strong executive sponsorship, with leadership actively driving the change management process to ensure smooth adoption across the organisation.

“Our transformation wasn't just about technology – it was about executive sponsorship ensuring the entire organisation was ready for change and aligned with our broader strategy.”

Melissa Morrison  
Executive General Manager, People and Culture, Komatsu Australia

## Results



Full digitisation of the HR lifecycle, eliminating manual processes such as paper-based leave forms.



Improved employee engagement and performance management through integrated systems.



Successful adoption of SAP SuccessFactors driven by executive leadership, ensuring alignment with organisational strategy.

## The key to successful change management

- 73% of successful HR transformations reported strong executive sponsorship as a critical factor.
- Companies with aligned leadership teams saw a 45% improvement in technology adoption rates.
- 60% of businesses with cross-functional executive collaboration achieved higher workforce engagement post-transformation.

## Key takeaway

Leadership is the driving force behind successful HR transformation. Technology, such as SAP SuccessFactors, plays a critical role, but it's the strength of leadership, combined with effective change management, that ensures smooth adoption and lasting success.

Komatsu's experience demonstrates how the right combination of executive sponsorship, change management strategies, and robust technology can revolutionise HR processes and create lasting value for the organisation.

# Leadership and technology shaping the future of HR

As HR Connect 2024 came to a close, one key message resonated: the future of HR depends on how well human leadership and technology are integrated. Leaders shared insights on using AI and cloud-based platforms to drive efficiency and improve employee engagement. Yet, it was clear – technology alone isn't the solution. Leadership remains the driving force behind any successful transformation.

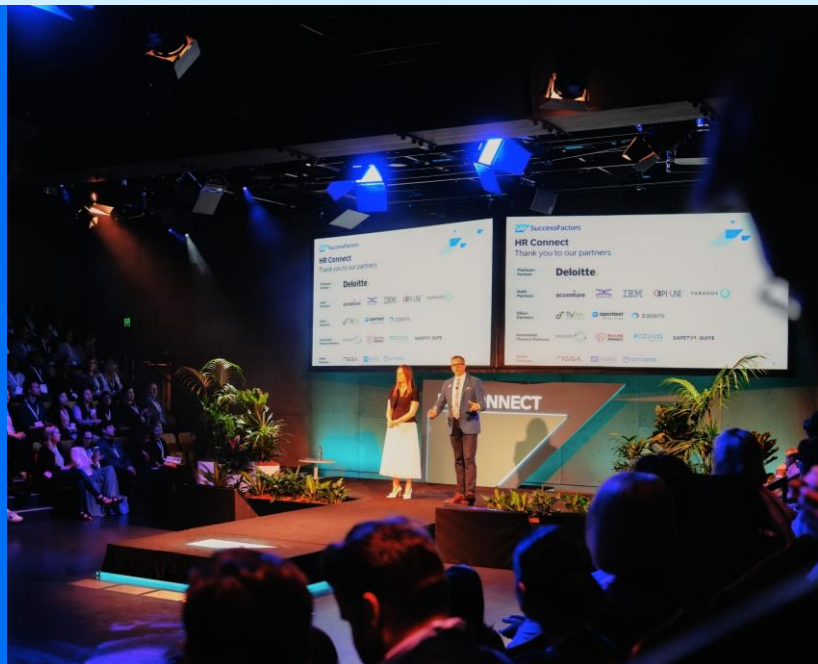
“Most of us can't individually change the world, but we can affect the immediate environment around ourselves. That's where we can exercise leadership and make a difference, whether in our workplaces or communities. No matter our level, it's this personal leadership that ultimately drives collective progress.”

Leigh Sales AM  
Award-Winning Author and Journalist, ABC

## Key strategies for HR leaders

So, how can HR leaders embrace this future while maintaining a people-first approach? Throughout the event, practical strategies emerged:

- Use AI to automate repetitive tasks and free up time for HR teams to focus on high-impact, strategic work.
- Build cross-functional teams that bridge HR and IT to ensure AI and other technologies serve broader business goals.
- Encourage continuous learning to help both leaders and employees adapt to an evolving workplace.



## A balanced approach to workforce management

As we look to the future, it's clear that adaptability will be key. AI, automation, and next-gen cloud-based computing are here to stay – but how will leaders ensure that these tools are used to empower, not replace, their teams? By developing environments that promote learning and growth, HR professionals can ensure that technology works alongside their people, supporting innovation and engagement.

