Chief People Officer Roundtable Series

Q4 2025 Summary

Overview

This summary captures the most pressing priorities, challenges, and innovations discussed by Chief People Officers from leading tech and life sciences firms during our most recent Roundtable series. It is intended to inform HR strategy and executive decision-making for 2026 and beyond. Resources shared by attendees are consolidated on **page 10**.

Key discussion topics included:

- Building a future ready workforce and including AI usage as part of performance reviews
- CPOs leading AI enablement efforts
- Attracting and retaining top performers
- New enterprise operating models and organizational design changes to maximize AI technology
- Skills required for HR leaders of the future

Additional discussions emerged related to compensation for AI talent, AI fakes in recruiting, managing job cuts related to AI, building bots, and international hiring. (see **Miscellaneous** section).

Insights & Takeaways

Our Q4 roundtable series made it clear that CPOs are starting to get their arms around workforce adoption of AI and are helping their organizations drive operating efficiency with technology tools. Our newest colleague, Dan Grosh, sat in on his first CPO roundtable and was impressed by how many CPOs are leading or co-leading enterprise AI adoption. That said, these are still early days.

Many of our participants were leveraging AI to streamline the performance review process. However, only a few were incorporating AI adoption into employee performance reviews, and most companies were still determining what they want to accomplish with AI and who will lead their AI initiatives.

Most of the CPOs were heavily involved in AI enablement efforts although none of our attendees were thinking about merging their CHRO and CTO roles.

Attracting and retaining top performers is still as important as ever, but the level of concern has waned significantly since 2022. Many of our attendees lamented that their attrition rates are too low while some worried that good employees were staying only because they did not have a better option.

The companies represented were not yet thinking about wholescale operational models and organizational changes to take full advantage of AI. Most are focused on basic company-wide training and point solutions in specific areas (e.g., recruiting or customer success). **We believe that operating model and organizational design discussions will become more prevalent as AI native entrants gain traction and progressive incumbents reinvent themselves and take increasing market share with higher margins.**

Very few of our participants were investing heavily in themselves in terms of their own development, especially as it relates to AI. Some were "tinkering" with AI tools and deploying homegrown or custom solutions.

Opportunity: Organize and lead the executive team discussion on how an AI-first operating model would redefine your company's structure and value proposition. Ask your favorite AI tool how to get started.

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Select Highlights

Topic 1: *How are you building a future ready workforce and performance culture? Have you incorporated employee usage of AI into performance evaluation/reviews?*

Quantifying the Business Impact of AI

- *Our board is interested in hard cost savings in workforce planning and how we are measuring those savings. HR is working to help the business identify roles that can benefit the most from AI. We are focusing most heavily on our call centers and recruiting. We are zero-basing every backfill.*

- *Our CEO asks, "If employees are more productive and efficient, are they taking on more tasks or working less?"*

- *We have a company-wide goal that every employee needs to give back 200 hours of productivity to the company.*

- *We aren't going to spend less on headcount. We are asking if we have the right people and how we will spend on agentic headcount. The board and CEO want to see agentic headcount in our plans.*

- *From a product standpoint, we are focused on the (AI) tooling we are deploying (Claude and Cursor) and measuring how much more code we can deploy. Our headcount budget and AI tools budget are one and the same.*

- *Our product is agentic, and we are talking to customers with workforce planning and how we price our product to make it competitive. When budgeting, some people think that operating AI agents is free, but they can actually require a lot of compute costs, and those costs can get out of control quickly if you don't understand them.*

- *We have a strong push for AI adoption in daily practice. For HR specifically: 1. Hiring: initial phone screen using AI instead of a human (CodeSignal tool); 2. BrightHire for TA notetaking and insights; and 3. An HR chat-bot for internal employee questions which has an 87% query success rate. The candidate experience for AI interviews was mixed, but some candidates appreciated the innovation.*

- *We have embraced AI in TA. Interviewers are entering notes into Greenhouse and then we leverage AI summaries of those interview sessions. We will emphasize more metrics and tracking in 2026.*

- *We are planning for a reduction in the number of recruiters and engineers as we adopt more AI automation. We intend to gain more employee engagement as well by utilizing AI for career growth and stretch assignments.*

- *I am being tasked to have recruiting be one of the areas where we really unpack our work and think about how AI will change what we need in terms of the work that gets done by people versus AI agents. There will be a particular emphasis on sourcing to learn what is out there in terms of people talent and AI tools. Our Business Development Rep (BDR) function will be the first one we unpack.*

- *In HR, we partnered with engineering to incorporate Gemini in Lever. AI looks at the inbox and ranks applicants against the job because there is no way recruiters can look at all of the applicants. It has done wonders for our job descriptions. Also, we built a Gem to help people write their reviews. Gems are specific. We downloaded all quarterly check-ins and added them to a Gem. It will then help you write your review and your goals for '26. My L&D person set this up. It saved me hours!*

AI & Performance Reviews

- *We are moving from adopting AI to measuring AI impact. Every individual will have a goal for AI impact not just the implementation of AI. We are adding agentic headcount so much so that I am thinking about changing my title and replacing the word Human to Agentic. Goal setting for 2026 will have some measure of AI impact tied to each specific position. Self-reviews will be done with AI! I'm excited because this is new and probably a rosy take, but we are trying to make it fun!*

- *Going into '26 goal setting at every level (company, function, individual), AI will be baked in. When we look at new vendors, we are requiring AI from them.*

- *It's a major initiative for 2026. We were a little behind the curve, and AI will be part of our strategic plan for 2026. We hired a Chief Data & Information Officer recently, and we will have training for all employees on expectations and goals.*

- *Our performance reviews are based on our values and one of our values is innovation. Has anyone embedded AI as a value?*

- *It is about working smart and working out of your comfort zone. We are going to try new things and some things may not work but that is how we evolve as people and a company. AI is embedded in our values with "curiosity" and "working smart." Our values are part of our hiring process, performance management, and exit interviews.*

- *[AI Innovation] is coming so fast; what is impossible today is possible in 90 days. So, change management does not make sense; instead, just build adaptability and resilience [into the culture].*

AI Training and Deployment

- *All of my team has been trained in AI so they can write GPTs on their own. We have an executive coach GPT for our executives. All of the exec team did personality assessments and frameworks for each discipline, and we loaded that into the GPT. They loved it and it gave them specific advice for different situations. For example, one leader might say, "I have this problem communicating with this leader and I can't get them to listen to me," and the GPT will come back and say, "Try presenting your data this way or use this type of slide," and this is based on both leaders' profiles. We use Enterprise ChatGPT internally. We do think Claude is better for nuanced questions and Perplexity for data questions.*

- *We hosted a three-day "hack" session for all employees, providing an opportunity to learn, build agents, etc. We created an agent where people could test their AI knowledge level, and then they were assigned different pathways. We have people who know how to build agents, and we paired them with people who had ideas they wanted to pursue.*

- *We have an AI "coach" called Nadia (by [Valence](#)). I can explain a personal problem and she'll offer coaching, including role playing to practice interactions.*

- *We are trying to automate some of our Operations work with AWS. AWS will help scope the project. They help create the AI projects and they bring the internal teams together. They will also ask the teams to suggest things that they want automated.*

- *Our scientists have carte blanch to use whatever they want to expedite their work. We also hosted some internal competitions, which generated some good outcomes. R&D is core to our company, and our people love being on the cutting edge.*

- *We have enterprise ChatGPT, but not as many people are using it as we hoped.*

- *ChatGPT will do training for employees and for specific topics if you have an enterprise license.*

- *We have an enterprise subscription to* LinkedIn Learning *and use it for employee/manager reviews. It will dynamically interact with you, and it will give you feedback on how to improve.*

- *Philosophically we didn't do any long-term contracts [for AI Software tools] because there is constant evolution.*

Compliance and Security Concerns

- *I am getting a lot of push-back from the legal team on HR agents.*

- *We are a government contractor, so we have been concerned about regulatory and compliance risk with AI.*

- *In the closely watched case* Mobley v. Workday, *the Northern District of California recently granted preliminary certification of a collective action for age discrimination claims against Workday's AI-based applicant recommendation system.*

- *Our IT department created an IT policy, which is basically* Pfizer's Policy Position on AI.

- *The amount of* shadow AI tools *being brought into companies is staggering. We created a list of preapproved AI tools for employees to use.*

> **Topic 2:** *More CPOs are being drafted to lead / support internal AI Enablement efforts. Context:* HBR: Should Your Company Merge Its CHRO and CTO Roles?

- *The [more closely] HR and Tech work together, the more effective the company will be.*

- *I'm partnering with IT often and find that I end up giving them a lot of direction on communication, usage, etc. So, I don't want it, but I find that I end up directing it a lot, anyway.*

- *I don't know all the current AI tech, and I'm not sure our IT department does, either.*

- *I just took over IT, and I think HR sells itself short sometimes. There's a communication piece that HR can add that helps IT implement changes and improvements more effectively.*

- *Our CEO is in "sell mode" for me to take on IT. It isn't foreign to me, and it is so critical to company goals and enablement. I ask myself, what would I want to take on more, payroll or IT (laughs)? I would need to have the right people to lead IT.*

- *IT is leveraging my department for training and awareness. We help people see how they can do their job differently.*

- *I work closely with our CTO on AI enablement and have subject matter experts present monthly AI training.*

- *Our CEO assigned me and the CTO to co-lead our employee AI enablement. We will create objectives for a multi-pillar transformation in 2026.*

- *I am part of a committee with the CISO, Marketing, and a project manager. We are focusing on governance and numerous use cases in addition to evaluating existing roles that can most efficiently leverage AI.*

- *Our AI steering committee is made up of my Head of Workplace along with leaders from Legal, Finance, IT, and Engineering.*

Topic 3: *What score (1-10) would you give your company on attracting/retaining top performers?*

Technology CPOs

- *People are being bought with millions of dollars so yeah, I'm worried.*

- *I am seeing two pools of AI talent: 1. Product and 2. Operations and Support. As of now, I don't think we know what we need from an AI talent perspective. For the operations/support functions talent pool, we want them to have "the art of the possible" approach. For the product/business pool, we will probably take the acquihire approach.*

- *We are leaning into the remote first with tech talent and it has helped us win technical talent.*

- *Being a remote company, we have hired a ton of people from Amazon. Our ability to attract top talent has shifted to the positive because we are fully remote.*

- *We just had a group travel to our corporate office, and they said that what they were able to get done working together, in person, Monday through Thursday, could have never been achieved working on Zoom. We are putting this type of travel in the budget for 2026.*

- ***I am at an AI-Native company,*** *and it is great, but we still really need to be pragmatic about what we can do with AI.* ***On the recruiting front, there was a desire to implement AI, but I have found that it has screened out some amazing talent.***

- *We have an [engineering] leadership team that is great at developing their people and they are being recruited aggressively by Meta. Turnover is 40% in that department, and it used to be in single digits. Last year, voluntary turnover as a company was 4% and this year it is trending to 10%.*

Life Science CPOs

- *I worry that we may lose people if we have good clinical results and then our stock pops (and everyone's equity pops too). Regarding recruiting, we're hiring as we prepare for commercialization, and we're having no issues.*

- *We are often being outbid for computational biologists, data scientists with bio backgrounds, and other AI specialists. They are getting huge offers. I'd give us a 6 or 7 for recruiting. We are seeing more attrition, but we're also getting some good inbound interest.*

- *We've rebranded, improved our culture, and had really good results from our engagement survey earlier this year. My concern is whether people are only staying with us because they don't have other options.*

- *We've focused on our employer brand as we've steadily grown. I feel we should hire up now, because it's going to be tougher when the industry comes back. On retention, we're trying to find the right mix on equity. We only have options now, and we are considering adding RSUs to the mix.*

- *We are a 9, but we're only three years old, and some of our senior people will be fully vested soon, so that makes me nervous.*

- *For biotech, the talent pool has changed. Due to layoffs at other companies, we can get some great talent, but we also have average talent staying put.*

- *I'm worried about technical developer skillset long term. Agentic AI has chopped off the entry level point for fresh college grads. The concern I have is, are we going to hit a plateau because we don't have foundational talent?*

Topic 4: *How is your executive team thinking about operating model and organizational design changes in light of AI technology potential?*

- *I am moving to a new company, and I want my new company to start with a white piece of paper when thinking about the organization and AI. There is a terrific book on this,* Reshuffle: Who Wins When AI Restacks the Knowledge Economy*. It talks about how some innovations have transformed pieces of the way we work, and other innovations have transformed the entire way we work.*

- *I like to understand the bigger picture, but we do not have [an AI] strategy because it is changing every five minutes. I am feeling paralyzed. What is the future of performance management in an AI world?*

- *We aren't thinking of it that way, but we created initiatives in '26 to build efficiency with automation.*

- *In engineering, we implemented* GitHub Copilot *and engineering headcount is down 10%. We track how many lines of code are being generated and the errors. On customer experience, our technical support team redesigned the entire team and leveraged some offshore talent. On Sales, we implemented an RFP response tool which replaced the entire team. Now one person is loading information and managing the tool.*

- *We have made lots of mistakes and have a lot of lessons learned. Originally, we bought the tools and showed them to everyone but didn't follow up. We found that people didn't use them. We tried the Field of Dreams approach, "if you build it, they will come…" but they don't. We now focus on specific use cases and rally everyone around that.* **Lesson Learned: Narrow the scope to be successful.**

- *We are doing some job architecture for how to operate in an AI world. Agentic AI will rework positions of a role but not replace the entire role. At the executive and board level, I find that they oversimplify AI and how to implement it.*

- *We need to be planning for this now so that we can uplevel our workforce and think about how we are hiring new people.*

- *We are looking at flattening our organization. At the initial stages,* Josh Bersin Company *is evaluating our product organization (1500 people).*

Topic 5: *What skill(s) do you need to learn to stay relevant as a leader of the future?*

- *Executives don't have a lot of routine things to automate so we are bringing in a consultant to train our executives on how to better leverage AI. They are excited about the training.*

- *I'm playing with AI tools and looking to learn more there as well as improving my personal brand internally and externally.*

- *Attending HR conferences that aren't focused only on life sciences is a good way to get some new ideas and resources. Likewise, talking to people and networking outside of HR is helpful – it allows me to think more broadly.*

- *We belong to Gartner, and I went to their conference in October. (mentioned by several participants)*

- *Managing and supporting my comp committee is my biggest challenge. I recently attended a [Comp Committee course](#) offered by Harvard; it is well worth the time and investment. Harvard offers other courses to get BOD certified, and I'm trying to talk my CEO into paying for that for me.*

Miscellaneous:

Compensation for AI Engineering talent

- *I saw a survey that had an 18% premium for talent with AI fluency even for operations.*

- *We have our ML team in Poland and France, and we are paying U.S. engineering rates, maybe not ML, but more than what they would make in their own country.*

- *We have done AI engineering at higher salaries throughout the U.S., both at my current and previous company.*

- *We pay a premium but are still adjusting by geography.*

- *In Europe, our salaries have been high since the beginning, paying a 30-40% premium to the local market.*

How are you dealing with recruiting and AI fakes?

- *We thought about having a final in-person interview. Putting in place different things to hopefully catch fakes at some point. We are also looking at IP location and LinkedIn profile creation dates. This extra work is slowing down our recruiting team.*

- *Our final rounds are done in-person, but we aren't doing a ton of hiring so the burden is not too dramatic. We did recently hire a director-level candidate who was holding down two to three full-time jobs. We discovered it by studying LinkedIn.*

- *We recently had two resumes submitted with different names and experiences but with the same phone number. There are a lot of bots out there and we need to be careful of the bad actors.*

How are you handling job reductions related to AI?

- *[Not surprisingly], people aren't thrilled about the job elimination. We position it as "trying to remove task friction so that you have free time to do the intellectual work."*

- *The company is pushing people to use AI to create efficiency, but we aren't upskilling the current employee population. The smart employees are seeing this and are concerned they aren't being invested in [which could lead to attrition].*

CPOs Tinkering with AI

- *I have built a couple of GPTs as well and the upfront programming is really important to limit hallucinations. You have to tell the GPTs not to hypothesize and not to go to the broad internet and pull information in.*

- *It took one hour to create an HR agent to help us with "one-touch onboarding" [which ensures that all of the disparate databases get updates with only one entry]. We used Zapier and it has built in seamless connectors with the systems we already have in place.*

- *We have no money, so everything I'm doing is with free tools. I'm experimenting by building a bot on my own.*

- *We had someone tell our HR GPT that they had "had it" with their boss and it gave them the suicide prevention hotline number.*

- *I have found Prompt Cowboy has helped me to put guard rails on my prompts. I also ask the GPT what else I should be asking.*

International Hiring:

- *Several attendees commented on new Waiver Code changes related to employment law in India. The quick takeaway is that India is working hard to reduce bureaucracy and be more globally competitive in employment.*

- *Opened an office in Colombia and staffed it in 90 days. Hired 20 people. We have found great talent there.*

How Are You Feeling About Your Company's Prospects in 2026?

An informal polling of our Life Science CPO attendees revealed that 74% were optimistic about next year; 26% were neutral; and none were pessimistic.

Final Takeaway:

According to the informal survey conducted by Naval Academy alum and FlemingMartin co-founder, Marty McMahon, 100% of attendees across both technology and life sciences were confident that Navy would beat Army on Saturday, December 13th. The only dissenting opinion was our West Point alum and co-founder, Fleming Jones.

Resources List (Mentioned during the roundtables)

AI Tools

- Beautiful.ai (AI resource for creating presentations)
- BrightHire (AI for Hiring)
- ChatGPT (OpenAI's AI Model)
- Claude (Anthropic AI Model)
- CodeSignal (AI Native Hiring Solutions)
- Confirm (AI for Development)
- CoPilot (Microsoft's AI Model)
- Gamma (AI resource for creating presentations)
- Gemini (Google's AI Model)
- GitHub Copilot (Developer platform)
- Glean (AI Assistant)
- Google Agentspace (AI Agent developer)
- NotebookLM (Google's AI Research & Writing Assistant)
- Perplexity (AI Model)
- Prompt Cowboy (AI Prompt Tool)
- Vids (Google AI Video Creation Tool)
- Workato (Agentic Automation)
- Zapier (Agent Developer)
- Zendesk (for customer support)

Articles/Books/Events/Podcasts/Websites

- AI Talent Comes at a 30% Salary Premium (Fortune Magazine)
- C-suite Leaders Break Their Own AI Rules (Article on Shadow AI)
- HR Heretics (Podcast)
- Mobley v. Workday (Age Discrimination Case Recap)
- New Labour Codes (India) Usher in a New Era of Compliance (Article)
- Reshuffle: Who Wins When AI Restacks the Knowledge Economy (Book)
- The AI-Driven Leader (Book)
- The Great AI Divide": Tinkerers vs Resisters (Podcast)
- Zapier's Bold Bet: Every New Hire Must Be AI-Transformational, With CPO Brandon Sammut (Podcast)

Coaches & Speakers

- BetterUp
- Ezra
- NeuroLeadership Institute (AI Coaching)
- Pinnacle (AI Coaching)
- Praxis (AI Coaching)
- Valence (AI Coaching)

Compensation & Benefits

- Alpine Rewards
- Harvard Compensation Committee Course
- Nectar (Recognition & Rewards)
- OnGoody corporate swag resource
- PayData
- Sequoia Benefits (Has an AI agent to answer specific benefits questions)

HR Ops/Talent Development/Org Development

- Blue Beyond Consulting (now part of BDO with a focus on HR Consulting)
- Gartner HR Symposium
- Josh Bersin Company (OD Consulting)
- Kathryn Matz @ Hands On L&D
- Kona (15Five Performance Management tool)
- Lattice (Performance Management w/succession planning tools)
- LinkedIn Learning
- MIT Sloan Exec Education
- Salesforce Pathways (Career Development)
- Sana (Workday's AI Knowledge Tool)

HRIS/ATS

- Greenhouse (ATS)
- Workday (HRIS)