



FUTURE^{OF} WORK

HR CONFERENCE

WHITE PAPER

2025

Reimagine Work.
Redefine HR.

Introduction

Future of Work

Elon Musk once said, "In 20 years work will be optional, like gardening or sport." Whether or not that prediction holds, one thing is already true: work is changing faster than most organizations can keep pace with.

The 2025 Future of Work HR Conference in Bahrain, under the theme "Reimagine Work. Redefine HR.", brought together HR pioneers, technologists, and business leaders to unpack what that change actually looks like on the ground.

This year's conversation moved beyond simply acknowledging AI's presence in the workplace and into how organizations govern it, lead through it, and build cultures that can absorb it without losing what makes them human.

Speakers included Ahlam Oun, Dr. Jassim Haji, Gadeer Al Kooheji, Jamie Groom, Mohamed Al Sayed, Narjis Almoosawi, Reem Osman, and Sangeeta Parmar. Together they explored the evolution from automation to agentic AI, real-world case studies from organizations already living this transformation, the emergence of new leadership roles built for an AI-enabled world, and how culture, diversity, and wellbeing sit at the center of it all.

This whitepaper captures the key insights, frameworks, and case studies shared throughout the day, offering HR leaders a practical reference for the decisions ahead.

With thanks to our speakers and partners for another year of honest, forward-looking conversation.

Barry Prost

Chair & Co-Founder
Propel Consult & Rent a Recruiter



Sangeeta Parmar

COO
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Conference Insights

The Evolving HR Landscape

Propel Consult marked 15 years in Bahrain this year, having placed 3,860 candidates with 536 employers and supported 260 local interns.

Attendees were asked a simple question at the start of the day: **have you used any form of AI in your work this week?** The overwhelming majority said yes, a sign of how quickly generative tools have moved from novelty to daily habit inside HR teams and beyond.

By 2026, 85 million jobs are expected to be displaced globally, while 97 million new ones emerge in their place. Half of all employees will need reskilling, and 40 percent will need it in under six months. 44 percent of core job skills are expected to change fundamentally rather than incrementally.

Regionally, only 25% of employees describe themselves as thriving, eight points below the global benchmark. Stress levels sit at 48%, among the highest in the world, on par with East Asia and the United States.

These numbers framed the day's conversation: **AI is not a future risk to plan for, it is a present reality already reshaping who does what work, how leaders lead, and what employees need to stay well.**

The Evolution of AI in HR

Dr. Jassim Haji walked attendees through the evolution of AI technologies in HR, from early rule-based automation to the autonomous systems now emerging.

Robotic Process Automation (RPA), introduced in the 1990s, automates repetitive, rule-based HR tasks such as onboarding paperwork, document verification, payroll updates, and leave processing. It acts as a digital workforce executing structured processes with speed and consistency, freeing HR teams to focus on strategic work.

Generative AI is the intelligence layer that followed. It creates original content and synthesizes complex HR information, powering personalized communications, policy summaries, performance review drafts, and training materials at scale. It also performs analytical synthesis, combining data across HRIS, payroll, and performance tools to surface real-time insights on turnover risk, productivity, and engagement.

AI Agents go a step further, automating entire HR processes rather than single tasks. An AI agent functions as an autonomous digital employee, able to perceive, reason, and act across systems to manage recruitment cycles, onboarding, and case handling end to end, with minimal human intervention.





The Data and Algorithms Behind HR AI

Every AI system in HR runs on data and algorithms working together.

The key types of data feeding HR AI include employee profile data (personal details, work history, skills), performance and productivity data (KPIs, reviews, task completion), learning and development data (training participation, skill assessments), and engagement and sentiment data (survey feedback, internal communication, morale indicators).

These feed into four key categories of algorithm: predictive analytics, which forecasts attrition, hiring needs, and career progression; behaviour and performance analysis, which uses machine learning to evaluate work patterns and engagement signals; and recommendation algorithms, which match employees with training, roles, or opportunities based on skills and career goals.

Understanding this pipeline, from raw data to algorithm to decision, is what separates organizations that use AI responsibly from those that simply deploy it and hope for the best.

Applications of AI Across the HR Function

AI in staff relocation combines cloud-based platforms, machine learning recommendation systems for housing and schools, GIS mapping for commute times and safety, and predictive analytics for cost and timeline forecasting, fully automating what used to be a manual, multi-week process.

AI in employee turnover prediction uses predictive modelling on performance and absenteeism data, natural language processing on internal communications to detect sentiment shifts, and behavioural analytics on system usage patterns to flag early signs of disengagement and flight risk.

AI in workforce forecasting applies time-series machine learning models to predict staffing demand, optimization algorithms to generate efficient schedules within labour rules, and real-time data analytics to adjust workforce plans dynamically as conditions change.

Technology in HR, Then vs Now

Before AI, HR technology meant digitising what already existed: paper files became HR software, payroll and attendance tracking became automated, job applications moved to online portals and applicant tracking systems, and training moved to e-learning platforms.

AI has changed what technology does in HR, not just how it stores information.

Today, AI scans CVs, matches candidates, and predicts best-fit applicants. Chatbots and video analysis handle screening and early interviews. Learning paths and performance insights are personalized to the individual. Predictive analytics forecast turnover and workforce needs before they become problems. Smart HR assistants handle routine employee queries, scheduling, and onboarding support automatically.

The shift is from HR technology that records what happened to HR technology that anticipates what will happen next, and increasingly, that acts on it.

Applications of AI Across the HR Function, continued

AI-powered HR documents and procedures now use large language models to interpret HR manuals and answer employee questions instantly, while retrieval-augmented generation ingests new regulations and automatically updates guidelines and communications.

AI-powered employee support automates responses to policy and benefits questions, guides employees through onboarding and travel requests step by step, and handles routine tasks like generating HR letters and scheduling meetings, escalating only what genuinely needs a human.

In recruitment marketing, AI optimizes job description language to remove bias and improve reach, targets high-fit candidate segments, and automatically tunes campaigns in real time to improve performance.

ERP-driven HR platforms such as Oracle Cloud HCM, SAP SuccessFactors, and HiBob now combine payroll, recruitment, and performance management with machine learning to reduce manual tasks, improve accuracy, and personalize the employee experience at scale.

Beyond HR-specific tools, platforms like LinkedIn's skills intelligence engine and OpenAI's generative models are increasingly embedded directly into workforce planning and HR automation, while AI-driven cybersecurity systems, such as Darktrace's self-learning platform, now identify an average of 150 novel threats per week in major financial institutions, a reminder that HR data protection is now an AI problem too.



Local Use Cases from the Region

Several regional organizations shared AI tools already live in their HR operations.

- An HR chatbot now simulates human dialogue to manage end-to-end HR functions, answering employee questions, screening candidates, and scheduling interviews without manual intervention.
- An employee payroll monitoring dashboard uses machine learning to analyze historical payroll data, automatically detecting inconsistencies and reducing manual audit time while improving payroll accuracy.
- A recommendation system for training courses personalizes learning paths by matching employees to development opportunities based on their skills, performance, and growth needs.
- An AI training system generates presentations, quizzes, flashcards, and assignments directly from uploaded documents, paired with a chatbot that answers lesson-related questions.
- A CV analysis recruitment system scans and matches resumes to job requirements more accurately than keyword-based applicant tracking, saving recruiter time and improving candidate-role fit.



Recruitment Innovation, Pre-Imagined

Her starting point was a distinction between re-imagining and pre-imagining. Re-imagining assumes the system is broken and needs restructuring. Pre-imagining means reconnecting with the foundational human elements recruitment started with: human instinct, authentic conversation, character assessment, presence and interpersonal signals, and potential beyond credentials.

According to LinkedIn Talent Trends 2024, 72% of hiring managers say their best hires were chosen based on soft signals not visible on a CV, the exact things AI cannot detect: emotional intelligence, adaptability under pressure, life story context, cultural intuition, personal ambition, and simply, presence.

Ahlam walked through how recruitment technology has evolved from 1950s analog filing systems through keyword-matching applicant tracking systems to today's recruitment-specific AI, embedded into every stage of the hiring funnel from sourcing to onboarding. She was clear that 2025 marks a shift away from generic large language models like ChatGPT toward AI solutions built specifically for recruitment, with the context, integrations, and compliance built in, and that recruiters who fail to adopt this intentionally, rather than simply experimenting with it, will fall behind.

Ahlam Oun, Director at General Assembly, closed the AI thread of the conference with a session on what she called "pre-imagined" recruitment, human centered hiring in an AI accelerated world.



Case Study

When the Score Gets It Wrong

To make the point concrete, Ahlam shared two live case studies from General Assembly Bahrain.

**1**

A real GA job description and a real staff member's resume were scored for fit by two different AI models



ChatGPT rated it 65%



Gemini rated it 58%

In reality, the person was a 100 percent fit for the role.

2

her own resume against a GA job description were scored for fit by two different AI models



ChatGPT rated it 88%



Gemini rated it 92%

prompting the same question from the room: what do these numbers actually capture, and what do they miss?

The proof of concept from GA Bahrain's own Employability Skills Training reinforced the message. Once AI was used to remove admin load, repeated instructions, manual CV fixing, and alignment checks, what teams gained back was deeper conversations, more clarity, stronger mindset development, more targeted support, and stronger human connection. As Ahlam put it, this is the recruitment model of the future: AI handles the process, humans handle the potential.

She closed with a picture of what pre-imagined recruitment actually looks like in practice: recruitment that sees people, not data points; AI clearing the noise so humans can hear stories; companies identifying potential, not just patterns; faster funnels that lead to deeper human moments; talent pipelines built on capability rather than keyword matching; and a hiring experience that feels personalized and empowering rather than automated and transactional.

Case Study

NBK and the Future of Work

Robotics is moving beyond factories into daily business operations, improving speed and safety in repetitive tasks while creating new roles in maintenance, programming, and engineering. Autonomous vehicles are transforming logistics and transport, reducing human error while opening new roles in data and fleet management.

AI is now embedded in nearly every business function at NBK, automating routine work like data entry and scheduling while creating new roles in AI training, oversight, and ethics. The biggest shift, Gadeer noted, is not AI replacing people but AI and people collaborating to enhance creativity and problem-solving.

Virtual reality is redefining how NBK trains and onboards its people. NBKVerse, the bank's VR onboarding experience, immerses new hires in NBK's culture and operations through an interactive 3D environment, letting employees "walk through" departments and meet virtual colleagues before their first day.



Gadeer Al Kooheji, VP and Head of Talent Acquisition at National Bank of Kuwait, shared how NBK is embracing four major technology trends reshaping work: advanced robotics, autonomous vehicles, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality.

NBKVerse, Results and Reflections

New hire success rate increased from 85 percent to 91 percent. Manual onboarding time dropped by 2.5 days per employee. Onboarding satisfaction rose by 22 percent. New hire retention reached 81.7 percent, up from a baseline of moderate, inconsistent candidate satisfaction, with candidate satisfaction now rated above 90 percent. Manual onboarding time fell from around three days to roughly half a day, and recruitment moved from heavy reliance on external agencies to fully in-house hiring and digital onboarding.

Employee testimonials captured the human impact behind the numbers. One new hire said the experience made them "feel more connected and ready" before their first day. Another described it as "like entering NBK before even working here."

Gadeer's core message was that NBKVerse reflects a broader belief guiding NBK's digital transformation: technology should enhance connection and belonging, not replace them.



Human-Centred Leadership in an AI World

Mohamed Alsayed opened with a line from Eric Schmidt, former CEO of Google: "We are the last generation of leaders who have only led people." His session argued that AI has quietly turned every all-human workforce into a human-plus-machine team, and treating that shift as purely an IT project is already failing.

When AI goes wrong, Mohamed argued, the failures are leadership failures, not technical ones. He pointed to real examples: Zillow's algorithm-driven home buying business reported a 421 million dollar loss in a single quarter after mispricing homes at scale, and airline chatbots have mishandled sensitive customer situations, including sending cheerful automated responses after a customer death.

His conclusion: "blame the AI" will not survive as an excuse. Job descriptions, KPIs, and integration matrices all need to be complete, accurate, and free of the ambiguity that used to get quietly absorbed by human judgment. AI systems take inputs and produce outputs accordingly. Sloppy inputs, whether templated job descriptions or conflicting targets, produce sloppy, sometimes costly, outputs.



Evolving Workspaces

Narjis Almoosawi presented on how physical and organizational workspaces are being redesigned around technology, employee expectations, and global disruption, drawing on real examples from BASREC's ship-repair operations.

the 5 Forces

Five forces are reshaping the modern workplace: digital transformation, hybrid work trends, a well-being focus, talent competition, and sustainability. At BASREC, this has translated into digital reporting and electronic approvals, improved shift planning and safety, and simple wellbeing initiatives like engagement programs and birthday leave.

New work models discussed included activity-based working, with purpose-designed spaces for planning, welding, machining, and inspections tailored to each team's tasks, hot desking and shared workspaces that let engineering and operations teams cluster around project needs, and a trust-based performance culture that emphasizes results over hours.

The workplace of the future, Narjis argued, balances open collaboration spaces, quiet focus zones, wellbeing spaces, and smart technologies, delivering measurable advantages: higher productivity, better retention, stronger employer branding, and more efficient use of space. Organizations that get this right stand out in recruitment and employer branding, while those that resist change need a clear, phased change management strategy to bring people along.



Panel Discussion, Culture, Diversity, and Wellbeing at Work

The day closed with a panel featuring Reem Osman, Chief of Culture, and Sangeeta Parmar, COO of Propel Consult, discussing how organizations build culture, diversity, and wellbeing into daily practice, not just policy documents.

The conversation tied directly back to the day's central theme: **AI can automate tasks, but it cannot manufacture belonging, trust, or psychological safety.**

Key takeaways from the Culture, Diversity, and Wellbeing panel

1

Real inclusion lives in daily moments, who gets heard, whose ideas get credited, who feels safe speaking up, not in annual reports or awareness campaigns.

3

As AI absorbs routine work, pressure on employees does not disappear, it shifts toward job security anxiety, constant reskilling, and always-on availability.

2

Only 25% of regional employees describe themselves as thriving, with stress and anger levels among the highest in the world.

4

Culture and wellbeing must be built into the transformation roadmap from day one, not added as a recovery plan after the damage is done.

Closing Thoughts

The 2025 Future of Work HR Conference made one thing clear: the conversation has moved past whether AI belongs in HR. It is already there, in recruitment, payroll, workforce planning, and employee support, and it is evolving fast, from simple automation toward autonomous, orchestrated agents.

What separates organizations that thrive in this shift from those that struggle is not the sophistication of their tools, but the strength of their leadership, culture, and governance around them. HR's role is expanding from partner to accelerator, new leadership roles are emerging to bridge technology and culture, and physical workspaces are being redesigned around trust and flexibility rather than fixed desks and hours.

AI will not transform your business. Leaders will. Your AI strategy is, at its core, a human-centred strategy.

For inquiries or collaboration opportunities, contact Barry Prost at barry@propelconsult.com