Al-Futtaim

Human Transformation: How AI is redefining the CHRO mandate

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In 1985, chess grandmaster, Gary Kasparov, played a simultaneous exhibition match in which he competed against 32 of the world's best chess computers. Kasparov won every single match, without difficulty, in the space of just a few hours. The widely accepted conclusion: despit the impressive evolution of machine learning, human intelligence was and would forever remain, unassailable. It was a short-lived assumption. A little over a decade later, an IBM super-computer called Deep Blue convincingly defeated Kasparov, creating a worldwide sensation, heralded as "the end of an era", the pivotal moment when a machine surpassed human intelligence. Since then, the evolution of chess engines, using progressive forms of AI, means that the app sitting on your smartphone today easily surpasses the capability of Deep Blue.

But there is a twist in the tale. A year after his defeat at the hands of this early form of AI, Kasparov introduced for the first time a new concept called "advanced chess", bringing together the best human and computer skills. This new concept increased the level of play to heights never before seen in chess. In fact, it revolutionized the game to such an extent that even average players, leveraging only a standard machine proved capable of beating a super-computer or a chess grandmaster playing alone. Humans and machines working together produced error-free game that harnessed perfect tactical play and strategic acuity but with human feeling and instinctiveness. What started as a competition ended up becoming an experiment that proved by far the best outcomes were achieved by combining the forces of the mental and emotional processes. This level of outcome could only be achieved by the synergy of skilled human chess player leveraging the computational processing capacity of powerful chess computers. Today, this powerful lesson, carries significant resonance for CEOs looking to harness AI as a source of competitive advantage within their business model. Critically, it also suggests that the CEO should turn towards the CHRO, as much if not more that the CIO, to lead AI enablement at scale.

Introduction: The pivotal role of the CHRO in enabling the AI powered organization

Artificial Intelligence is often framed as technology-led initiative. Yet, for organizations that are seeking to deliver enterprise value, AI needs to be seen not simply as a tool to automate tasks. AI fundamentally reshapes jobs, drives upskilling, redistributes decision rights, resets operating models and challenges us to reconsider deeply embedded ways of working. AI redefines how work is sequenced, how judgement is exercised and how accountability is shared between humans and machines. AI directly intersects with creativity, innovation, cognition, problem-solving and communication. It also throws up a myriad of human emotions linked to identity, confidence, relevance and future employability. In the last five years, many companies have seized productivity gains but also come to the realization that augmentation not elimination of jobs is where true value sits. And just like prior technology-based revolutions, while many traditional jobs are under threat, millions of new jobs will be created by AI.

This is why AI enablement must be understood, not only as a digital transformation, but primarily as a **large-scale human transformation**. While AI changes what technology can do, it is human transformation, leveraging AI, that truly determines what value we can create and also what the future of work looks like.

Historically, technology transformations have been led by CIOs, with HR supporting downstream change management. AI profoundly disrupts this conventional logic. Yes, CIOs remain essential in providing technology platforms, data and governance, but CHROs need to be in the driving seat of the human transformation, partnering with the CEO, CIO and business leaders, and pulling on all the organizational levers required to ensure AI delivers impact at scale.

This whitepaper explores the pivotal role of the CHRO in delivering value through AI as a fundamentally human transformation. In this critical respect, I propose that the CHROs role must span four critical, inter-connected dimensions which collectively represent a holistic model for AI enablement:

Design Architect

Redesign work, roles and decision rights so that human and AI capabilities are integrated into a new operating model that creates sustainable enterprise value.

Capability Steward

Build enterprise wide, continuous learning systems that rapidly upskill and reskill the workforce to work confidently and productively with AI.

Adoption Catalyst

Enable widespread bottom-up AI value by empowering employees to identify, co create and embed use cases, where the work happens by those who understand it best.

Transition Guardian

Ensure AI adoption is socially responsible, consistent with the organization's broader employee value proposition, safeguarding ethics, transparency and long term employability.

CHRO AI Enablement: Human Transformation Model - David Henderson (All Rights Reserved)

1. Design Architect

The CHRO plays a central role in reimagining how work gets done in an AI enabled organization. This goes far beyond incremental automation or tactical role substitutions. AI reshapes workflows, redistributes decision rights, and changes the balance between judgment, execution and oversight. The CHRO must therefore provide overarching direction that enables the coherent redesign of operating models, roles and governance structures so that human and AI capabilities are intentionally combined to deliver better outcomes for customers and other key stakeholders, enabling commercial wins not just less expensive or faster processes. This includes clarifying which decisions remain human led, those which are AI supported, and where accountability ultimately sits. It requires CHROs to step away from their current value chain and re-imagine end-to-end value flows in an AI enabled organization.

Critically, this operating model transition needs to be highly dynamic and responsive. AI capabilities evolve rapidly, and organizations must be able to continuously adapt to how work is structured.

The CHRO ensures that job architectures move away from narrowly defined jobs towards tasks and most vitally skills, steering the organization towards outcome based designs, enabling greater flexibility, mobility and resilience. By embedding AI into the operating model rather than layering it on top, the CHRO helps the organization unlock sustainable value while avoiding fragmentation, role confusion and the unintentional exposure to risk.

In this capacity it is vital that the CHRO brings a collaborative and agile mindset to the fore. The CHRO should be empowered to act as a co owner of enterprise AI strategy, partnering with the CIO to align human transformation with technical capability, and both must align with the CEO to ensure AI supports long term value creation. This critical partnership axis also reframes AI from a cost or productivity lever into a strategic growth and resilience capability.

In my own experience, incrementalism in this domain is almost always destined to fail. Bold and decisive design decisions are often needed, and this may even mean breaking up parts of the organization that have long been accepted as a core part of the value chain. For example, Procter and Gamble redesigned decision models in forecasting, procurement and product innovation with AI producing insights and options, while humans retain final say on portfolio bets, supplier strategy and innovation priorities. Crucially, AI has been embedded into logistics decision forums rather than remaining siloed in group-level analytics teams, which have been reconfigured to reflect this change. P&G's intentional step to integrate AI powered analytics into the value chain removed information-sharing barriers, streamlined workflows and enabled real-time decision making at scale based on immediately available accurate data.

Of course, Generative AI provides opportunities to do the same amount of work as before with fewer people. But, what if that surplus capacity was purposefully put to work on capturing greater value. Microsoft intentionally redesigned all knowledge work roles so AI copilots can handle drafting, synthesis and retrieval, while the employees in those roles, retain judgment, prioritisation and accountability. This required the firm to explicitly redefine the capacity and structure of knowledge-work roles and their decision rights. The transformation removed large amounts of low value cognitive effort from knowledge work, which was reprioritized into delivering revenue generating innovation and customer experience improvements. Less human time preparing inputs and more time on judgment, prioritisation and action which delivers faster cycle times, more output per employee, and a higher utilisation of human capability.

AI transformations tend to fail far more often because of organizational design choices than because of technology limitations. When companies deploy AI without redesigning how work is done, decision rights blur, accountability erodes, resistance to change increases and productivity gains stall. The result is weak tool adoption without a clear return on investment. By contrast, best in class organizations deliberately separate insight generation from judgment and accountability. They use AI to scale analysis, synthesis and options, while explicitly empowering prioritisation, trade offs and ownership as human responsibilities. They take proactive steps to redefine work structures, systems and processes that enable the optimal combination of human skills and technology platforms and tools. Organizational clarity is fundamental to unlock sustained value at scale. Being intentional on organizational design for CHROs means staying one step ahead of technological adoption and building out a dynamic blueprint of organizational design decisions, root and branch, across the operating model. As **Design Architect**, the CHRO must proactively lead the process, re-imagining the impact AI could have on the value chain, and translating this into operating model design, rather than reactively following behind technology roll-outs and course-correcting downstream.

2. Capability Steward

The successful enablement of AI depends less on deep technical expertise in a small population and more on broad based capability across the enterprise. The CHRO therefore builds enterprise wide, continuous learning systems that enable employees to work confidently, critically and productively with AI. This includes developing AI fluency, strengthening judgment and problem solving skills, and ensuring people know how—and when—to rely on intelligent systems and agents.

Learning in this context must be practical, contextual and embedded in the flow of work. Traditional, episodic training models are insufficient for the pace of AI change. One size fits all models are highly limited and unlikely to drive the required capability shifts. The CHRO designs learning ecosystems that combine formal development with experiential learning, peer networks and on the job application. By democratizing reskilling and upskilling, the CHRO ensures the workforce can keep pace with AI advancement, reduces adoption friction, and protects long term organizational capability. AI academies based on persona-based learning paths are one simple way in which organizations can start to deconstruct diverse populations and to focus customized upskilling an reskilling at scale.

Amazon treats AI capability as a core workforce infrastructure rather than a specialist skill. It has built role specific learning pathways that combine foundational AI fluency with immediate, in role application—particularly in operations, logistics, and corporate functions. Learning is tightly linked to day to day workflows, ensuring employees can apply AI tools confidently at scale and in real-time rather than completing abstract training. This has resulted in faster adoption of AI tools across large frontline and corporate populations, with measurable productivity gains driven by applied capability rather than isolated expertise.

During my time at Zurich Insurance, we built an enterprise wide AI and digital capability ecosystem that combines broad AI literacy with deep domain specific learning for underwriters, claims handlers, and risk professionals. Learning is continuous and embedded, supported by internal AI tools that reinforce skills through daily use leading to the confident adoption of AI in regulated, high judgment roles, enabling scale without increasing operational or ethical risk. The platform at Zurich also emphasized the identification of transferable skills, for example, enabling the group to quickly retrain and redeploy claims handlers as customer service agents given a strong existing the overlaps in the skill profiles for those job families.

In the AI era, capability, not technology, is the primary constraint on value creation. Organizations that treat AI learning as episodic training struggle to scale adoption, while best in class companies build continuous, enterprise wide learning systems embedded in daily work. As **Capability Steward,** the CHRO ensures the workforce can adapt at the pace of AI change, convert tools into performance, and protect long term organizational resilience as skills rapidly evolve.

3. Adoption Catalyst

As Adoption Catalyst, the CHRO ensures that AI value creation is not confined to central innovation teams or leadership mandates. Many CHROs of my generation were drilled on the belief that change management starts at the top of the house, with a guiding coalition and structured project management timelines. That playbook is long obsolete, at least when it comes to AI enablement. While strategy and governance are essential, scalable impact comes from bottom up adoption - where employees identify opportunities to apply AI in the context of real work. The CHRO creates the conditions for this to happen by empowering employees to experiment, co create and embed AI use cases where insight is deepest, and value is most immediate. Without bottom-up ideation and innovation, AI will fail.

But equally, leaders need to be fully engaged in challenging and supporting teams, in curating the change management plans and in facilitating tools deployment. Change management needs to give way to change orchestration.

This requires a fundamental shift in change management philosophy. Rather than driving adoption through compliance or instruction, the CHRO fosters participation, ownership and trust. Incentives, recognition, learning pathways and leadership behaviours are aligned to encourage experimentation and knowledge sharing across the organization. By democratizing AI adoption, the CHRO accelerates learning cycles, avoids bottlenecks, and turns the workforce into an active engine of innovation rather than a passive recipient of technology.

At Al Futtaim, the group's Blue Loyalty Platform demonstrates how bottom up AI adoption can unlock direct commercial value by enhancing and customizing customer experience. By combining behavioural, transactional and partner data, AI models recommend personalised offers and purchase suggestions across our retail and service channels. Critically, these use-cases were not developed by senior leaders, but rather by multi-disciplinary frontline retail employees, who were engaged in agile action-learning teams focused on building out recommendations. Insights were sourced where customer insight is deepest and embedded directly into frontline and digital workflows, rather than being designed centrally in isolation. The result of this approach is that AI is being channelled powerfully to drive relevant customer engagement, increased conversion and repeat purchase, and measurable revenue uplift driven by AI use cases rooted in real customer interactions.

Google runs AI adoption through a culture of experimentation supported by internal communities, shared tooling and lightweight governance. Employees use AI to improve workflows, products and services, with successful use cases productised and scaled through internal platforms. This results in the rapid diffusion of best practices, strong employee ownership, and continuous improvement driven by those doing the work.

AI value does not scale through mandates or central programs—it scales only when it is fully adopted where work happens. Organizations that rely solely on top down change quickly plateau, tools are deployed, but behaviour does not change and value remains trapped in pilots. By contrast, sustained AI impact emerges when employees are empowered as co creators, embedding AI into real workflows, decisions and customer interactions. As **Adoption Catalyst,** the CHRO unlocks this engine of value. By orchestrating participation rather than compliance, HR accelerates learning cycles, builds ownership and converts experimentation into performance. Bottom up adoption is not a cultural nice to have—it is the mechanism through which AI becomes embedded, differentiated and commercially meaningful at scale.

4. Transition Guardian

As Transition Guardian, the CHRO ensures that AI adoption aligns with organizational values and strengthens—rather than undermines—the employee value proposition. AI introduces legitimate concerns around fairness, transparency, surveillance, bias and job security. If these concerns are not addressed proactively, trust erodes and adoption stalls. The CHRO therefore safeguards ethics, employee agency and psychological safety as central components of the AI transformation. By embedding ethical principles, transparent communication and human oversight into AI adoption, the CHRO balances innovation with responsibility—protecting both performance and people. In doing so, AI becomes a source of shared progress rather than fear or disengagement. Salesforce have embedded ethical and responsible AI as a prerequisite for scale, not a control imposed after deployment. The company requires mandatory Responsible AI training, embeds human in the loop oversight for AI enabled decisions, and applies clear disclosure standards when AI influences employee or customer outcomes.

The trust fostered by this approach, in turn drives improved employee engagement workforce trust, faster adoption of AI tools, and reduced legal, regulatory and reputational risk as AI scales into sensitive decisions.

While AI will undeniably change roles and skills, the CHRO ensures that workforce transitions are managed responsibly, with clear pathways for reskilling, redeployment and progression. Strategic workforce planning is vital to help employees navigate their own career journey and to build the skills required to be flexible in what is destined to be a turbulent and dynamic jobs market for the foreseeable future. Skill pathways are likely to replace traditional career paths. Today's employees need to focus less on specific target jobs and more on transferable skill profiles. They also need to feel that an organization has their back and that means providing clarification on the technical and human skillsets that the firm is prioritizing for the future. Unilever explicitly links AI adoption to employability and internal mobility. As AI reshapes roles, the company invests heavily in reskilling and redeployment pathways, reframing AI as augmentation rather than displacement. Workforce planning, learning and ethics are intentionally connected rather than siloed. By making this explicit to employees, confidence, sustained engagement during transformation, and reduced friction from fear based resistance can be overcome.

Transition management of this type requires honest and open communication based on responsible workforce planning to help people identify and pursue credible pathways to build a long-term employability. This becomes an imperative for the CHRO not just because without it, employee morale and engagement will drop but also because it goes to the very core of what it means to be a socially responsible and values-based employer.

Without clear ethical guardrails, transparent use of AI, and credible pathways for reskilling and mobility, employees lose trust and start to disengage. Best in class organizations recognize that performance gains from AI are only sustainable when people believe the transformation is fair, and in their long term interest. As Transition Guardian, the CHRO protects the employee value proposition during profound change. By safeguarding ethics, transparency, human oversight and employability, HR enables faster adoption, reduces risk, and ensures AI becomes a source of shared progress rather than fear. Trust is not a "soft" outcome of AI transformation - it is the hard prerequisite for scaling it.

The CHRO Skillset for AI enablement at scale

Having defined the four roles the CHRO must play to enable AI as a human transformation, the following section outlines the specific skills and attributes required to execute each role effectively and deliver impact at scale. In a context where AI success is increasingly determined by organizational design, skills, trust and adoption that reflects new models of change management, these capabilities define whether the CHRO and by extension, the wider HR team is shaping the transformation - or simply reacting to it.

Design Architect	Capability Steward	Adoption Catalyst	Transition Guardian
▪ Operating Model Design ▪ Work & Role Deconstruction ▪ Decision Rights Clarity ▪ Systems Thinking ▪ Enterprise Co-Creation	▪ Learning at Scale Design ▪ AI Fluency Translation ▪ Skills Architecture & Workforce Sensing ▪ Action Learning Systems ▪ Future Capability Stewardship	▪ Change Orchestration ▪ Employee Empowerment Mindset ▪ Incentive and Recognition Design ▪ Business Experimentation & Innovation ▪ Cultural Signal Analysis	▪ Ethical Judgement & Values Based Leadership ▪ Trust Building ▪ Strategic Workforce Planning ▪ Risk Identification and Anticipation ▪ Clear, Honest, Two-Way Communication

As **Design Architect,** the CHRO must be capable of operating model design—re shaping end to end value flows, governance and decision forums so that human judgment and AI generated insight are deliberately combined in the places that matter most. This requires disciplined work and role deconstruction, breaking roles into tasks, skills and decision points to determine what should be automated, what should be augmented, and what must remain decisively human led. It also depends on decision rights clarity, explicit accountability design that separates insight generation (often AI enabled) from judgment, prioritisation and ownership (human), so ambiguity does not creep into execution. Because these changes ripple across the enterprise, the CHRO needs strong systems thinking, anticipating desired impacts as well as any unintended consequences across structure, incentives, performance, careers and culture, rather than treating redesign as an isolated org charting exercise. Finally, the role demands enterprise co creation: the confidence and credibility to act as a co owner of AI strategy with the CIO and business leaders, shaping the blueprint together, not merely supporting delivery.

As **Capability Steward,** the CHRO must be able of overseeing design learning at scale, industrialising upskilling and reskilling across large, diverse populations, rather than concentrating capability in small expert elites. This includes AI fluency translation: turning abstract AI concepts into role specific, judgment based capability that makes sense in the context of real work and real decisions. It also requires a robust skills architecture and workforce sensing approach—building skills taxonomies and maintaining continuous insight into which capabilities are emerging, shifting, or declining as AI changes the skills economy. Critically, the CHRO must ensure learning is embedded in work, moving beyond episodic training towards development that is integrated into daily workflows and the tools employees use. And because capability is ultimately about sustained performance, the CHRO must practice future capability stewardship, protecting long term capability health, resilience and employability, not simply optimising for short term productivity.

As **Adoption Catalyst,** the CHRO needs strong change orchestration capability, shifting away from compliance driven, top-down change management to participation led adoption, experimentation and learning in the flow of work. That starts with an employee empowerment mindset, enlisting employees as co creators of AI use cases rather than passive recipients of centrally designed technology. Employees need to define the tools they need not simply learn the tools they are given. The CHRO must also be able to design incentives and recognition—aligning rewards, career signals and leadership behaviours to reinforce adoption, contribution and knowledge sharing. To avoid bureaucracy killing momentum, this role needs business experimentation literacy: comfort enabling rapid test and learn cycles (with a fail-fast mindset), preventing bottlenecks and avoiding over governance or excessive decision rights that will slows diffusion. Finally, the CHRO must demonstrate cultural signal awareness, understanding how leadership actions, language and symbols either accelerate adoption or quietly create friction, often more powerfully than formal programmes ever will.

As **Transition Guardian,** the CHRO needs to practice ethical judgment and values based leadership, necessary to have the moral authority to balance innovation with fairness, transparency and appropriate human oversight as AI moves into sensitive decisions. This dimension relies on trust stewardship, with acute sensitivity to employee sentiment— fear, confidence and identity — because trust is a prerequisite for sustainable adoption at scale. The CHRO must be able to build strategic workforce planning capability, explicitly connecting AI adoption to credible pathways for reskilling, redeployment and mobility so employees can see a clear and compelling future for themselves as work evolves.

Alongside this, the CHRO needs risk anticipation, proactively identifying and mitigating bias, surveillance, accountability and reputational risks before they become embedded and costly to unwind. And, perhaps most crucially of all, the CHRO must be able to deliver clear, honest communication, explaining uncertainty, trade offs and direction without dilution or false reassurance, which is essential for maintaining credibility through transition.

Conclusion

AI enablement is not a technology programme to be rolled out, but a human transformation to be led. The organizations that convert AI from experimentation into sustained value are those that deliberately redesign how work is done, how skills are built, how adoption spreads, and how trust is protected. In this context, the CHRO's role fundamentally expands—from steward of the existing workforce to architect of the human system that allows AI to deliver outcomes at scale.

By acting as Design Architect, Capability Steward, Adoption Catalyst and Transition Guardian, the CHRO enables organizations to move faster without fragmenting, to scale AI without eroding trust, and to unlock productivity without hollowing out roles. As AI continues to reshape work at unprecedented speed, the decisive differentiator will not be access to technology, but the ability to orchestrate human transformation around it. Those who get this right will not simply adapt to the AI era—they will define its competitive winners.