

Becoming More Agile:

A Global Study on Agility in High-Growth Enterprises






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Introduction

Human resources is on the front line more than ever as organizations look to their HR expertise to navigate these changing and unpredictable times.

But HR is also centrally positioned to guide the workforce and the business by:

-  **Adapting existing processes for new ways of working**
-  **Engaging employees and promoting growth**
-  **Ensuring firms have the right skills now and into the future**

The imperative for HR leaders in high-growth or mid-enterprise¹ organizations is to do more with fewer resources and smaller budgets, while keeping the business moving forward during turbulent times. How can they accomplish this feat? It all starts with organizational agility.

¹ mid-enterprise = 500 to 3,500 employees

Unlocking agility is often easier said than done. But, from our global survey of nearly 1,000 business leaders—“Organizational Agility at Scale: The Key to Driving Digital Growth”—we discovered that top-performing, agile organizations share five key traits.



Creating a robust strategy across these five traits will help HR leaders increase organizational agility for times of rapid change. In this eBook, we explore how HR leaders can adopt these traits to better engage their workforce and provide strategic guidance to their board and C-suite counterparts.



Responsive: continuous planning.

Based on real-time information, continuous planning enables organizations to react faster to shifting market conditions and potential risks. With the right tools, HR leaders can be confident in their decisions and support wider company goals. They can also be more strategic, adapting their workforce plans as business needs change and collaborating more effectively with other functional teams.

HR leaders who continuously plan:



Better understand their internal workforce—they know the talent they have and the gaps they need to fill to achieve business goals



Can maximize their existing workforce—reskilling and upskilling employees and making the business less reliant on costly and time-consuming external hiring



Have insights into workforce skills and capabilities to help their organization pivot as required and take advantage of opportunities

Our research highlighted what leaders consider as the three main hurdles to more continuous real-time planning: a lack of employee skills, a bureaucratic culture, and inflexible technology. HR leaders have the potential to initiate real change in these areas and contribute to their organization's goals and bottom line.

Three steps to continuous planning.

- 1 Know your business, know your workforce.** If you understand your company's strategic needs, you can adopt a fluid workforce strategy that helps it respond to market changes. Having a complete picture of your workforce mix allows you to align resources dynamically according to the needs of your business. This includes identifying new roles for existing employees and determining high-demand skills. Accurate data is also necessary for you and other leaders within your organization to understand the cost of your workforce.
- 2 Instill an open culture.** Putting an end to bureaucracy and breaking down barriers between teams and departments increases collaboration and knowledge sharing, and leads to better planning. Systems that connect functional teams—such as HR, payroll, finance, and recruiting—are critical because they enable decision-making across the business that's supported by up-to-date information, which ultimately informs continuous planning and growth.
- 3 Harness up-to-date technology and tools.** Leaders who support continuous planning by implementing new technology are 5x more likely to have the agility necessary to respond to challenges. For HR, technology can be the key to bridging departmental gaps—for instance, allowing greater communication and visibility between core functions. A single view enabled by a central platform can inform the end-to-end process with accurate information and drive value for the business.

Barriers to planning.

Continuous planning is a fundamental trait of agile and successful organizations. Yet, as the following survey responses show, many organizations find continuous planning challenging because of various barriers.

What are your organization’s main barriers to adopting a more continuous approach to planning?

Barriers	APJ	EMEA	NA	Average
Organizational culture	39%	28%	28%	32%
Lack of communication across the business	24%	26%	36%	29%
Lack of relevant skills	37%	21%	27%	28%
Lack of workforce capacity to continuously deliver	19%	25%	24%	23%
Outdated KPIs	20%	16%	18%	18%

What action is your organization going to take to facilitate a more continuous approach to planning?

Actions	APJ	EMEA	NA	Average
Upskilling, reskilling, and/or recruiting	39%	40%	30%	36%
Engaging the wider organization in planning processes	30%	31%	30%	30%
Deploying smart technologies (AI, ML, RPA) to increase workforce capacity	28%	28%	32%	29%
Enabling real-time access to reliable data	22%	30%	32%	28%

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We needed a tool that would enable us to all work together and accurately represent the complexity of our business and monitor our progress. If a district cuts its budget suddenly, we need to plan a scenario quickly to see how we can still serve them. I couldn't do that without Workday Adaptive Planning backing up those decisions with real-time data.

Elizabeth Cushing
President, Playworks

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When you start being able to paint a picture of a world where you can quickly and easily pull reports on your workforce and, more importantly, be confident that the data is accurate, that has quite an impact at the leadership level. As the business grew, we wanted the system to grow with us, and that's what led us to Workday.

Cathy Armor
Director for People,
Cambridge University Press

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Workday Adaptive Planning is changing the way we operate so we can support and influence the business instead of simply providing reports.

Michael O'Connell
COO, Hairhouse Warehouse



Online gambling operator Kindred Group simplifies workforce and headcount planning with Workday.

Manual spreadsheets couldn't accurately model staffing scenarios or adequately capture fluctuations in the market, which meant Kindred Group's workforce plans didn't support the business. Workday Adaptive Planning has given Kindred Group the ability to more effectively plan its workforce development. The user-friendly interface enables people throughout the organization to model workforce plans that provide stronger budgets and forecasts.





Adaptable: fluid structure and processes.

As our ever-changing business environment brings new challenges that require fast action, it's crucial that organizational structures and processes have the ability to quickly adapt. Companies with flexible systems are best positioned to realign their two most important assets: their people and capital.

With adaptable systems and a single view of data, HR leaders in medium enterprises can:



Understand immediate and future workforce needs and ensure investment in the right areas



Break down barriers between different parts of the organization to increase transparency and collaboration



Adapt recruitment and upskilling initiatives, and reallocate people quickly as required to maximize profitability

Investing in people is the most significant thing you can do to support the business. This means building a solid HR foundation, starting with a plan-to-hire process that matches individuals with the skills the company needs. You must also look at how employees are encouraged and rewarded. Adopting a more personalized approach to engagement, learning, and growth can give your organization the edge in attracting and retaining the talent it needs to capitalize on new opportunities.

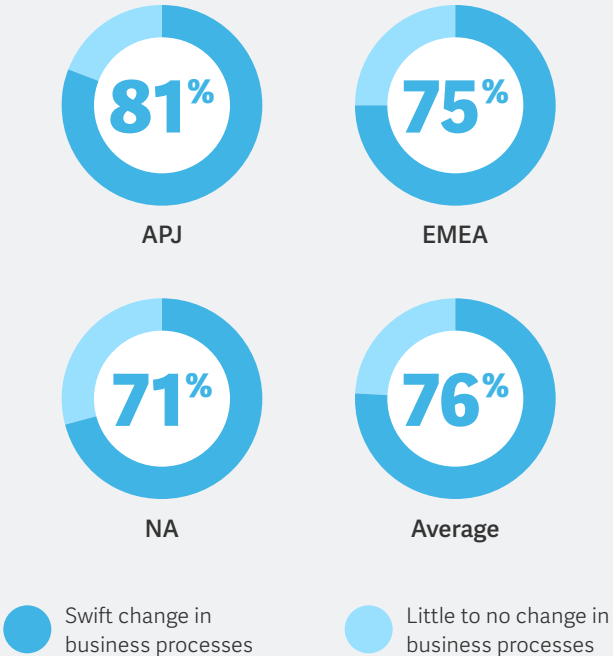
Delivering this successfully requires alignment between functions and visibility of information. With a solid, employee-focused strategy backed by enterprise-grade technology that links all parts of the business, your organization will be resilient in the face of changing market dynamics.



Responding to the pandemic.

How a company responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and its continuing aftermath says a lot about its ability or potential to be agile. The following survey responses show that nearly 3x as many companies quickly changed their business processes in response to the pandemic than those that didn't—a promising sign for the overall agility landscape.

Which best describes the response of your organization to the COVID-19 pandemic and its ongoing impact?



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We focus on providing a culture that enables internal growth and high employee engagement, so transparency is key. Prior to Workday, we didn't have a true HR system—we had one system for payroll and managed a lot in spreadsheets. Everything was disparate, which made it hard to find answers quickly. We don't have that issue with Workday. All the information we need is available at our fingertips.

Robert Stovall
CFO, MATRIX Resources

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With one system our finance, HR, and payroll departments can now collaborate more effectively and eliminate data discrepancies, saving them time and providing a clear view of the business. Essentially, our departments have gone from a purely operational to a more strategic focus.

Franck Haibl 
Workday Project Manager, Webedia

Transurban makes the right decisions with one view in Workday.

As toll-road operator Transurban approached its next growth cycle, it needed to ensure its core processes spanning finance, HR, and procurement were effectively supporting the business. With Workday Enterprise Management Cloud, Transurban gets a single version of the truth across functions, enabling better decision-making within teams and management. Lisa Tobin, group executive of Transurban Group, says, “Workday enabled our data to be visible and integrated across the organization, so our processes could be connected and have integrity across a growing and changing company.”

Single system helps ERPA strengthen employee-led culture and boost staff engagement.

Technology services firm ERPA wanted to transform its siloed, manual systems and give its workforce access to easy-to-use tools and accurate, up-to-date information. Now, instead of having to log in to multiple applications, employees can see all the workforce data they need in one place with Workday. The software provides a better user experience for the company’s 600 remote workers, who enjoy the intuitive interface and feel empowered by the self-service capabilities.





Skilled: building the future workforce.

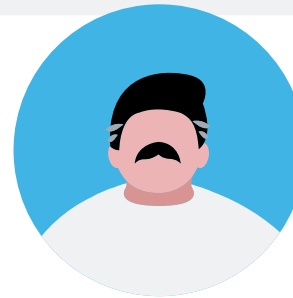
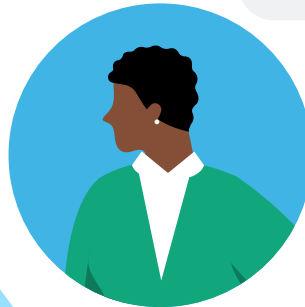
Having the right skills gives organizations the agility to deal with change. And as the business landscape continues to evolve—with new skills emerging and others becoming obsolete—managing the workforce will be essential for companies in order to realize their digital plans.

As shown in our survey “Organizational Agility at Scale: The Key to Driving Digital Growth,” leading firms are significantly more likely to have plans to upskill their workforce in order to contend with the evolving nature of work. By increasing the capabilities of your existing employees, you not only build the skills you need organically, but you also encourage employee engagement and create a reputation as an organization that values and supports its workforce.

Because mid-enterprise organizations are often at an earlier stage of workforce planning, it is especially important for HR leaders to drive the direction of the skills strategy. HR should be at the center of initiatives, playing a pivotal role in developing internal talent and encouraging a culture of learning that will benefit both the business and the workforce. More importantly, by building the basics—processes, systems, and culture—you will be establishing a foundation for your organization’s growth.

Three key challenges for HR leaders in building a skilled workforce.

- 1 Understanding your skills landscape.** Employee communication is central to cataloging the skills across your workforce. People are often best placed to identify which skills they will need to develop their roles, and as an HR leader, you need to encourage this process and provide a way to make the information available across the organization. This will give your business the agility to match work to existing employees, helping it shift in new areas as opportunities emerge.
- 2 Identifying what’s missing.** How do you know which skills your enterprise will require in the near- and long-term? Cross-functional collaboration is vital, as is an understanding of the wider objectives set out by the C-suite and board.
- 3 Filling the skills gap.** How do you empower your workforce to take responsibility for their skills journey? How do you promote learning? Encouraging a culture of employee development will help you get the right training to the right people. Looking to fill the skills gaps internally through education often pays dividends and avoids costly and time-consuming recruitment processes.



Outdoor clothing designer Patagonia gets data-driven insight into its skills landscape.

With a successful brand and culture, Patagonia's HR leadership knew how important it was to keep their employees engaged and supported in their career development. Using machine learning in Workday, the firm now has access to accurate, real-time workforce information, enabling it to support employee growth and development. Kylie Riley, Workday manager at Patagonia, says, "It's really important that we have internal opportunities for our employees, because we want to make sure they can continue to contribute to the business in amazing ways."



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One of the challenges of internal recruitment is that you're always playing the waiting game. With machine learning in Workday, we no longer have to wait.

Shannon Ellis
Director of Human Resources, Patagonia

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Before, we couldn't collect skills data on every single person in the company. Skills data on our employee population was about 28%; with Workday, we were able to up that to 73%.

Kylie Riley
Workday Manager, Patagonia

Barriers to embedding new capabilities.

Increasing and maintaining organizational agility requires continually embedding new capabilities within an organization’s workforce through recruiting or upskilling. But today more than ever, companies face considerable headwinds in hiring and retaining talent with the required skills, as the following chart illustrates.

What are the barriers to embedding new recruitment and upskilling capabilities within your organization?

Barriers	APJ	EMEA	NA	Average
Global market uncertainty (COVID-19 pandemic)	44%	51%	41%	45%
Difficulty hiring/retaining employees with the required skills	33%	31%	29%	31%
Lack of budget and/or resources for retraining and upskilling existing employees	29%	28%	32%	30%
Lack of the required skills in the job market	28%	27%	28%	28%
Lack of C-suite/board-level support	22%	20%	23%	21%

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Workday made it much easier for team leaders to work out whether they had the right complement of skills and staff, and whether their budget could accommodate the team’s total remuneration.

Alison Tweedale
Head of Transformation, Genesis Specialist Care Pty Ltd





Empowered: informed and delegated decision-making.

Leaders and managers need to be equipped with the right information at the right time to make the best possible decisions. But fast decision-making in a rapidly changing world cannot be left to chance—it requires a structured approach to collecting and analyzing data enterprise-wide.

Responses to our survey indicate that more than half of leaders believe that access to data within their organization is somewhat accessible, but remains outdated and siloed. Getting data out of these disparate systems and making it usable across all functions is the first step to creating a consistent view of the business and enabling agile decision-making. Next, applying machine learning can complement human skills to get faster insight into areas of the enterprise that directly impact the bottom line.

HR leaders have a vital role to play in providing usable, timely metrics that solve challenges and support growth. Strong analytics delivered through a single system allow HR professionals to strategically support leadership teams, helping them better understand operational efficiency through key performance indicators, such as:



Workforce mix including skills, capabilities, and career interests



Workforce costs across the business, as well as within departments and teams



Employee productivity



Cost of internal and external recruitment

These metrics are especially important for organizations experiencing growth or transition, enabling them to keep up with rapidly changing work dynamics based on real-time insight. Fast, well-informed decision-making saves resources and increases success.



We're one of the fastest-growing companies in Southeast Asia, and without a strong engine such as Workday behind us powering our data and people information, our growth would not be as fast—plus, we wouldn't know if we were making the right decisions.

Chin Yin Ong
Head of People, Grab



Workday provided us with a single global process for several areas of the business and streamlined our processes, which helped us create true alignment between our teams globally.

Cyril Gutter
Head of Global HRIS, Evotec

Using data to support success: Grab grows from ride-hailing start-up to multinational enterprise.

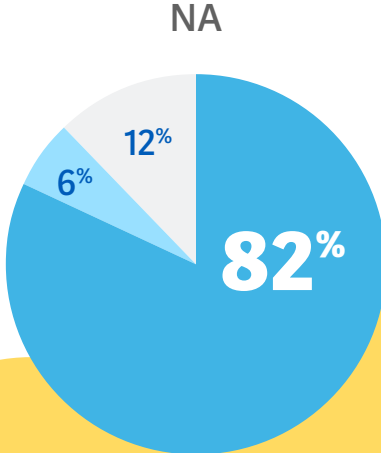
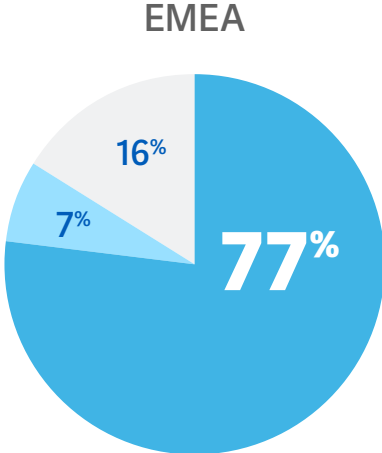
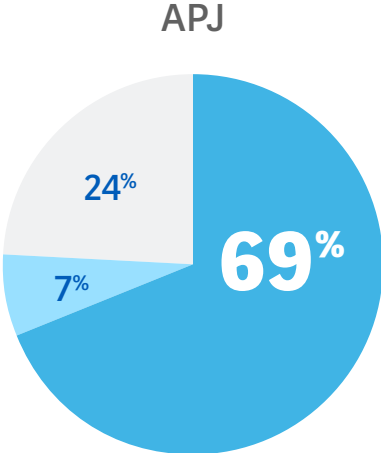
Based in Singapore, Grab provides a range of services from safe transport systems to financial products. The company was expanding rapidly and needed a more structured approach to managing its workforce and gaining insight from its people data. Real-time analytics through machine learning in Workday has helped the HR team become highly responsive to the business, working side by side with management and providing metrics that promote greater growth and success.



Access to relevant data.

Accessibility to data doesn't seem to be a challenge for many organizations. However, questions remain about the best way to gather and share actionable insights, which we discuss later. Lack of analytical skills within the organization, referenced in the next section, is also a key impediment.

Do you agree or disagree that relevant data encourages employees at all levels to make decisions?





In control: performance measurement and guidance.

Constantly measuring performance helps businesses pivot quickly away from failing products or investments and pursue successful new ventures. By tracking the right people, projects, and processes, organizations can quickly spot successes and failures and deploy resources—both people and capital—accordingly.

Tracking performance is essential for agility—it helps leaders understand how investments are made across the enterprise and the changes in direction that are needed to thrive. In this way, measurement and understanding of performance in real time is a vital tool in navigating risk.

Is the cost of developing a new service starting to outstrip its potential value? What initiatives within your firm would boost the bottom line with a small additional increase in investment? These are questions that HR leaders can help answer if they have an up-to-date understanding of their people and roles, and the company's larger goals.

So while a “fail fast” mentality starts within the board and C-suite, it must be present throughout the workforce for an organization to maximize its digital success.

HR leaders can accelerate digital revenue growth by:



Connecting people performance with company performance



Effectively aligning resources with digital programs



Ensuring a culture of innovation across the organization



Recruiting and retaining people that are flexible in the face of change and can adapt to new business situations



Service-focused bank gets a complete view of its operations with Workday.

Oriental Bank, which serves consumers and businesses in Puerto Rico, wanted to automate processes and drive digital platforms. However, this strategic initiative was hampered by fragmented back-office systems. Using Workday, the bank now has a platform that combines HR and financial data, helping it streamline internal processes and give teams organization-wide access to information to better support business strategies.

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It’s important that we make the right decisions for our people and our financial success. Workday has put information into the hands of everyone across the business. We see Workday as part of a larger ecosystem that supports the effective growth of the bank.

Ganesh Kumar
Chief Operating Officer, Oriental Bank



Barriers to updating metrics.

Because decisions are only as good as the data they’re based on, ensuring that key metrics are up to date should be a top priority. For many companies, this goal is easier said than done because they lack access to trustworthy data.

What are your main barriers to ensuring that metrics are updated and aligned with your business objectives?

Barriers	APJ	EMEA	NA	Average
Bureaucratic decision-making	17%	32%	27%	25%
Lack of analytical skills	37%	24%	26%	29%
Lack of integration between systems and/or software	21%	32%	30%	28%
Lack of cloud-based technologies (real-time analytics, autonomous database)	27%	27%	25%	26%
Change-averse culture	31%	23%	27%	27%
Lack of process for regular review of metrics	24%	21%	16%	20%

What actions are you taking to ensure that metrics are updated and aligned with your business objectives?

Actions	APJ	EMEA	NA	Average
Increasing investment in cloud-based technologies (real-time analytics, autonomous database)	46%	31%	39%	36%
Increasing integration between systems and/or software	29%	34%	36%	33%
Increasing alignment among planning, measurement, and evaluation cycles	28%	27%	34%	30%
Embedding an adaptive culture	26%	26%	30%	28%
Decentralizing decision-making	28%	24%	20%	24%

What factors have been most beneficial in ensuring that your organization's metrics are continually updated to align with business objectives?

Factors	APJ	EMEA	NA	Average
Highly integrated systems and/or software	53%	47%	63%	54%
Smart technologies (AI, ML, RPA) have increased workforce capacity for real-time measurement and evaluation	71%	42%	54%	56%
Investment in cloud-based technologies (real-time analytics, autonomous database)	29%	36%	60%	42%
Alignment among planning, measurement, and evaluation cycles	59%	31%	24%	38%
Decentralized decision-making	6%	20%	24%	17%



Conclusion

An organization's success is determined by how it prepares for and manages change—in other words, its organizational agility. As research indicates, workers that are motivated, engaged, and empowered are a company's most valuable resource in driving digital success. Indeed, leaders of agile firms recognize that employee engagement is vital to move from siloed, individualized modes of working to cross-functional, future-ready teams.

Mid-enterprise organizations have an advantage today. With leaner operations than their larger counterparts, they can shift resources more quickly and react with greater agility to market challenges. Within the medium enterprise, HR leaders are in a unique position. They have the potential to make a real difference and are critical in building a solid foundation that:



Supports a culture of learning and growth to fuel innovation



Adapts to internal and external dynamics



Enables digital transformation through insight based on real-time data

Workday provides a single platform to give visibility across all areas of an enterprise. It brings together operational, transactional, financial, and people information to create a single source for data. The result is an agile organization that's underpinned by a skilled, adaptable workforce ready to act on the opportunities of a digital age. As an HR leader, it's time for you to embrace your team's role as a trusted, integral part of leadership and help your growing enterprise successfully navigate change.





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