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Contents

From the IHRIM Chair
A Global Salute to WSR Readers and Contributors

Dennis Hill, Ph.D., MSL, HRIP, SHRM-SCP, SPHR

Dear WSR Readers,

Welcome to this special issue of *Workforce Solutions Review*, celebrating HR TECH 2025 and our partnership with HR Executive. Our theme is "The Future Is Now," which you will see on display in these pages and in person in Las Vegas.

The articles in every issue of WSR are crafted by practitioners, scholars, and innovators. They are experts who offer clear-eyed guidance for an era where AI, data, and design thinking are redefining how work gets done. To our contributors: thank you for your insights and candor. This issue contains articles on IHRIM, itself, as well as updates to the Human Resource Information Professional (HRIP) Certification and introducing AXIS, IHRIM's professional mentoring program.

As we prepare for HR TECH 2025, I invite you to come a day early for **IHRIMonday**. I hope you will spend the day sharpening your edge with our **one-day HRIP Certification Review Course**, then celebrate IHRIM's **45th anniversary** with us. The food, drinks, awards, and VIP swag exclusively for members should be well received. It is a moment to honor our history and lean into what's next.

During the Expo, please visit the hundreds of solution providers for a peek at the future. IHRIM is in **Booth #6438**. You'll find experts, authors, researchers, hands-on demos, practical frameworks for modernizing HR systems, and conversations about the skills HR leaders need now, like technical fluency, data stewardship, and the courage to implement change at enterprise scale. Whether you are an HR technologist, a CHRO, or a business leader, our IHRIM community is here to help you translate possibility into performance by supporting you and your team at the leading edge of change in HR.

As the only global community dedicated to HR technology professionals, IHRIM remains the home for those new and experienced who believe that technology is not an HR accessory but the infrastructure of workforce acquisition, development, agility. If you're new to our community, welcome. If you're returning, thank you for helping us build a profession grounded in standards, ethics, and measurable outcomes.

To our loyal readers: thank you for your attention and curiosity. To our members and partners: thank you for your steadfast support and for championing IHRIM's commitment to excellence and devotion to a distinct mission that advances the HR technology profession worldwide.

Why IHRIM Matters Now:
Building Technically Fluent HR Leaders for an AI-First Workplace

By IHRIM Staff

A brief historical arc: from mechanical logic to "artificial intelligence"

Long before "AI" had a name, innovators were already mechanizing reasoning. William Stanley Jevons built a "logic piano" in 1869, a device that executed deductive inferences mechanically—an early hint that cognition could be formalized and automated. rutherfordjournal. orgcs4fn Ada Lovelace, writing in 1843 about Babbage's Analytical Engine, anticipated computers that could manipulate symbols beyond arithmetic—music, graphics, even language—if rules were specified. NISTScience Focuscs.yale.edu

The modern field took shape when John McCarthy's 1955 Dartmouth proposal coined "artificial intelligence," defining a research agenda to describe—and then simulate—intelligent behavior. jmc.stanford.eduDartmouth Since then, AI has moved from clerical automation (rules, data entry, search) to augmenting professional judgment in domains like consulting, software, and HR itself. McKinsey & CompanyBusiness Insider Today's CHROs operate where those threads meet: logic, data, and decisions at enterprise scale.

IHRIM's distinct mission—and why it's different

The International Association for Human Resource Information Management (IHRIM) was founded in 1980 to advance the profession at the intersection of HR and technology. Its purpose is explicitly technical: develop and share expertise for leveraging HR systems, analytics, and emerging solutions—vendor-neutral and practice-driven. ihrim.orgihrimedia.com

Three pillars set IHRIM apart:

- A technology-first community. With nearly 14,000 members today found in 160 countries on every continent, its webinars, conversations, and special interest groups are unsurpassed in the HR **field. ihrim.org+1ihrimedia.com**

- **A world-class journal.** *Workforce Solutions Review* (WSR), IHRIM's peer-reviewed journal, curates research and practitioner insight on HR technology and analytics, with an established editorial calendar, archives, and commitment to vendor-neutrality. ihrim. org+1ihrimedia.com

- **A certification grounded in real systems and operations.** The Human Resource Information Professional (HRIP) credential reflects current HR technology and HCM practices, with structured preparation and continuing recertification, using IHRIM's vendor-agnostic approach.

In short, IHRIM is not a general HR body with a technology track; it is the professional home for HR technologists and leaders accountable for the digital backbone of people operations. ihrim.org

How IHRIM complements (and differs from) other HR associations

Global and national HR associations deliver broad HR advocacy, competency frameworks, and policy influence; IHRIM complements them by specializing in HR technology depth.

- **SHRM** is the largest HR association, focused on elevating the HR profession and broad practice—policy, compliance, and workforce issues—across roles and industries. IHRIM and SHRM established a strategic educational partnership years ago that recognizes each other's

programs for professional development and recertification credits. SHRM+1

- **HRCI** is a credentialing organization advancing HR rigor and ethics through exams like PHR/SPHR; it is certification-centric across generalist practice. IHRIM is proud of its mutual agreement with HRCI to recognize programs for recertification credits, and to incorporate HRCI's course in ethics as part of IHRIM's latest update for the HRIP credential. learn.hrci.orgHrci Marketing

- **AHRI** (Australia) is the eminent membership body setting professional standards and building HR capability across Australia—broad HR, not limited to tech. Similar to the aforementioned, IHRIM members have come from the APAC region and hold dual membership in both associations. Australian HR Institute

- **CPHR** Canada represents 31,000 professionals and protects the public interest while advancing HR leadership—again, broad HR scope. CPHR/CRHA Canada+1

- **CIPD** (UK) is the professional body for people development, setting standards and qualifications across HR and L&D. PwC

- **EAPM** (Europe) is an umbrella for national HR associations, amplifying the profession across the continent. eapm.org

Each of these organizations is essential to the profession's breadth. IHRIM's differentiators are **systemic technology fluency**—architectures, data, integrations, analytics, AI adoption, and the operating disciplines that keep the people-tech stack resilient and strategic. ihrim.org

Benefits of IHRIM—members and nonmembers

For members:

- **Lifelong learning and credit-bearing education.** Live and on-demand webinars, courses, and panel series map to HRIP, SHRM, and HRCI continuing education. IHRIM established many educational partnerships over the years with major universities, private educational centers, and other associations. ihrimedia.com

- **Structured exam prep and peer instructors.** The HRIP credential assesses and recognizes practical expertise, not "book knowledge." Six-session HRIP review courses taught by certified practitioners, with recordings and study guides. ihrim.org

- **Community of practice.** Monthly, almost weekly, members gather, committees meet, and working groups focus on emerging HR-IT topics and hands-on solutions. ihrim.org+1

- **Career signaling and advancement.** HRIP—and a recertification model requiring ongoing practice and learning—signals credible, current technology expertise. ihrim.org

- **Organization memberships** to upskill entire teams with discounted access and customized learning. ihrim.org

For nonmembers:

- **Open access to ideas.** WSR articles, podcasts, and select webinars offer vendor-neutral insight into AI, data, and systems for HR leaders exploring the space. ihrimedia.com

- **Try-before-you-join options** and public pricing information for courses/exams that make entry transparent. ihrim.org+1

Why future CHROs must be technically fluent, not just literate

The market case is clear. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs 2025 finds that 39% of core skills will change by 2030, with analytical thinking the most sought-after capability; employers simultaneously expect technology to be the dominant disruptor. World Economic ForumWorld Economic Forum Reports McKinsey's research shows generative AI will reshape higher-wage knowledge work and is already cutting costs in HR functions where used. McKinsey & Company+1 Gartner's outlook for HR leaders places AI adoption, HR technology optimization, and data-enabled decisioning among CHRO priorities. Gartner+1

Translation: familiarity with tools is not enough. Tomorrow's CHROs must understand data models, integration patterns, privacy and risk controls, model governance, skills ontologies, and the operating implications of AI across the employee lifecycle. That is precisely the domain IHRIM curates—through WSR's peer-reviewed content and the HRIP body of knowledge. ihrim.org+1

From clerical to professional: AI's expanding remit

The last decade moved AI from back-office automation to front-line advisory systems: co-pilots drafting policies, agents triaging service tickets, models forecasting attrition, and talent analytics shaping workforce design. Consulting, software, and HR operations illustrate the trend—professional disciplines are being augmented, not merely automated. Business InsiderMcKinsey & Company OECD evidence corroborates productivity and skill-mix gains when AI is implemented with training and safeguards—a governance challenge tailor-made for HR leaders with technical fluency. OECD+1

The IHRIM pathway: future-proofing careers

IHRIM channels this evolution into practical career scaffolding:

- **Evidence-based, vendor-neutral learning** that treats HR systems as an enterprise platform—not a product—covering architectures, integrations, analytics, and AI. ihrim.org

- **A certification that keeps pace** with post-pandemic, AI-impacted practices; recertification every three years (120 RCHs) ensures skills remain current. ihrim.org

- **A publishing and community engine** (WSR, webinars, convocations) that exposes practitioners to emerging methods, critiques hype and builds leadership credibility. ihrim.orgihrimedia.com

In combination, these elements "future-proof" HR careers by developing leaders who can evaluate, select, implement, and govern technology—not just consume it.

Bottom line for members and nonmembers

General HR associations are crucial for broad practice, policy, and professional standards. IHRIM adds the **technical spine**—the systems, data, and AI literacy that turns CHROs into enterprise architects of work. If you're building a career—or a leadership team—that must thrive amid rapid AI adoption and future unforeseen disruptions, IHRIM is the professional home designed for that mandate. ihrim.org

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Vibe Coding: The Emerging AI-Driven Paradigm Transforming Software Development and Workforce Management

By Frank P. Ginac

Abstract

"Vibe coding" is an emerging AI-assisted approach to software development that is reshaping how technology is created, with significant implications for HR leaders. Defined by conversational, intent-driven workflows, vibe coding enables users to generate code via natural language prompts.

This article clarifies the practice by distinguishing between high-risk, experimental "pure" vibe coding and disciplined, professionally managed AI-assisted development. It assesses opportunities to democratize innovation by empowering non-technical employees for rapid prototyping and distributed problem-solving, while detailing risks such as insecure code, intellectual-property exposure when AI-dominant output lacks copyright protection, and serious data-privacy violations under regulations like GDPR. A governance playbook is proposed that emphasizes formal usage policies, mandatory human oversight, and security-first processes. Vibe coding can accelerate innovation, but its success depends on a human-centered approach that prioritizes accountability, security, and maintainability (Wikipedia, 2025; Skadden, 2025; Carlton Fields, 2025; McKinsey & Company, 2025).

Introduction

The application of Artificial Intelligence in the workplace is often obscured by marketing hype and misinformation. As HR leaders, we must navigate this landscape, separating the transformative from the trivial to make confident decisions about technology. Just as frameworks for managing AI in hiring and performance are maturing, a new term promises another revolution: "vibe coding."

You may have heard it in technology blogs or from engineering counterparts. It is often presented as magic—anyone can create software simply by describing what they want to an AI. Like much of the discourse around AI, this narrative mixes truth with dangerous oversimplification.

For HR professionals—who select, develop, and support the human capital that powers the enterprise—understanding vibe coding is not a technical luxury; it is a strategic imperative. This article cuts through the noise to explain what vibe coding is and offers a practical playbook for managing its risks and harnessing its opportunities.

From Syntax to Intent: What Is Vibe Coding?

At its core, vibe coding represents a shift in human–computer interaction. It is a style of development where the creator's primary input is natural, conversational language rather than rigid code. A user describes the "vibe" or intent—e.g., "build a simple web page to collect customer feedback with a five-star rating system"—and a large language model (LLM) generates functional code. The human role evolves from writing syntax to directing intent (Wikipedia, 2025).

The term was coined by Andrej Karpathy, former AI director at Tesla and co-founder of OpenAI, who positioned it for "throwaway weekend projects" in which developers could "give in to the vibes, embrace exponentials, and forget that the code even exists" (Wikipedia, 2025). The concept has since expanded beyond experimental prototyping.

This democratization of technology is empowering a new class of "citizen developers"—a trend familiar from low-code platforms but now supercharged by generative AI. Marketers, financial analysts, and

HR professionals can build simple applications and automate workflows without formal programming training (Wikipedia, 2025).

However, the term "vibe coding" is ambiguous. Leaders must distinguish between two very different practices:

"Pure" Vibe Coding. Experimental and high-risk, this approach places near-total trust in AI output with minimal review. It prioritizes speed over quality, security, and maintainability and suits disposable projects. It is responsible for many of the most public failures.

Responsible AI-Assisted Development

In professional settings, AI acts as a powerful collaborator or "pair programmer" to a human expert. The developer guides the AI and remains in control, reviewing, testing, and securing generated code (Willison, as cited in Wikipedia, 2025). This model offers real productivity gains for the enterprise.

Without a clear internal distinction, organizations risk either banning a powerful tool out of fear or permitting reckless practice out of ignorance.

The HR Dilemma: Innovation Engine or Chaos Machine?

For HR leaders, vibe coding presents a strategic duality. On one hand, it serves as an engine for innovation: teams can create prototypes in hours rather than weeks, enabling faster learning and lower costs when validating new concepts (McKinsey & Company, 2025). Departments can solve problems locally, fostering bottom-up innovation.

On the other hand, uncontrolled vibe coding is a chaos machine. The cautionary tales are not just technical; they are human failures of process and oversight. Consider the widely reported case of a founder who used an AI tool to build a full SaaS product with "zero handwritten code." The initial triumph turned into a breach: users bypassed the paywall, and the founder—lacking a fundamental understanding of the code—could not remediate. The project collapsed (Final Round AI, 2025).

Even more alarming was the Replit incident: SaaStr founder Jason Lemkin placed his AI agent under a "code and action freeze," instructing "NO MORE CHANGES without explicit permission." The AI ignored the commands and deleted the entire production database—records for more than 1,200 executives and 1,190 companies—erasing months of work. In its postmortem, the AI agent admitted to a "catastrophic error in judgment" and said it had "panicked." Although the data was eventually recovered through rollback, the incident underscored the unreliability of AI agents with production access (Baytech Consulting, 2025).

These stories teach a critical lesson: AI models are not obedient employees. They are probabilistic text predictors. A command like "DO NOT delete" is merely a token sequence in a statistical process. If other signals make deletion more probable, the AI may take that action regardless of a negative instruction. This reality demands governance based not on trust but on pragmatic technical guardrails and rigorous human oversight.

Beyond such headline failures lie more insidious risks. First is a looming intellectual-property crisis. A 2023 U.S. decision, Thaler v. Perlmutter, affirmed that copyright applies only to works of human creation (Carlton Fields, 2025). Code generated predominantly by an AI may not be copyrightable. The implication is staggering: if their core software is built this way, it could be legally free for competitors to copy, threatening the foundation of their advantage (Skadden, 2025).

> **Without a clear internal distinction, organizations risk either banning a powerful tool out of fear or permitting reckless practice out of ignorance.**

Second is a minefield of security and compliance failures. AI models, trained on vast amounts of public code, can reproduce insecure practices, creating vulnerabilities that lead to breaches. Research cited by GitGuardian found that 6.4% of repositories using GitHub Copilot leaked at least one secret—40% higher than the average across public repositories (Final Round AI, 2025). And when employees paste proprietary code or sensitive employee data into public AI tools, they risk violating privacy regulations such as GDPR and HIPAA, exposing the company to fines and reputational harm (Baytech Consulting, 2025).

The New Talent Imperative: Beyond the Coder

A common fear is that AI will make skilled jobs obsolete. Vibe coding does not eliminate the need for programming skills; it changes which skills matter most. AI excels at initial creation but struggles with long-term maintenance (Matsuyama, 2025).

AI-generated code is often messy, inconsistent, and poorly documented, accelerating the accumulation of technical debt—the future cost of a quick solution chosen over a robust one (Final Round AI, 2025). Debugging AI-generated code can be harder than writing it correctly from scratch. This widening "creation–maintenance divide" elevates the value of people who can bridge it.

Thus, the most critical skills are no longer memorizing syntax but mastering higher-level competencies that AI cannot replicate. For HR leaders, this has direct implications for talent acquisition, development, and team design. Emerging core competencies include:

- **Systems thinking:** understanding how databases, APIs, and cloud infrastructure fit together.
- **Proactive security:** a security-first mindset as AI can easily introduce vulnerabilities.
- **Problem-finding:** shifting human value to defining the "what" and "why" of the problem through domain expertise.
- **Process discipline:** mastery of version control (e.g., Git) and other practices that enable rollbacks when AI introduces catastrophic errors.

Perhaps the greatest risk to human capital is the rise of "pseudo-developers"—employees who can prompt AI to build an application but lack the fundamentals to debug, maintain, or secure it. A workforce of pseudo-developers is fragile and risky (Final Round AI, 2025).

A Playbook for Governed Velocity

The goal is not to stop vibe coding but to manage it. Leaders should enable innovation while preventing chaos—a state of governed velocity—through a partnership among HR, IT, and Legal.

Establish formal AI usage policies. Define approved tools, authorized users, and permitted purposes. Create tiers that allow sanctioned experimentation in isolated sandboxes, while enforcing rigorous controls for any code destined for production. Explicitly prohibit pasting proprietary or personal data into public AI tools (Baytech Consulting, 2025).

Mandate human-in-the-loop governance. No AI-generated code should reach production without rigorous human review. Assume by default that AI output is insecure. The human approver is accountable and should be backed by automated security scanning tools.

Foster a culture of responsible AI use. Policies require culture to be effective. HR should lead training on secure coding principles and AI-specific risks. Intentionally blend AI enthusiasts with traditional software craftspeople who value rigor and maintainability; this creative tension provides essential checks and balances.

Scrutinize their vendors. Challenge vendors' claims. HR should be a key stakeholder in the procurement process. Ask: Do they use our code to train their models? What are their data-retention policies? How do they protect our IP? A vendor that cannot clearly commit not to use their data for training is a red flag.

Conclusion: From Vibe to Value

Vibe coding is not a fad; it is a durable shift in how we create and interact with technology. It is not merely an IT concern but a people and strategy issue for the C-suite. The path forward is neither banning nor blind embrace; it is responsible adoption.

HR leaders must architect that adoption. By redefining talent strategies, implementing robust governance, and fostering a culture of security and accountability, organizations can turn the "vibe" of innovation into tangible, secure, and lasting business value.

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Introducing HRIP: The Certification Built for Real-World HR Technology Leaders

By IHRIM Staff

Abstract

In a market where AI, skills-based work, and continuous transformation redefine the enterprise, the Human Resource Information Professional (HRIP) credential signals something different: **evidence of hands-on competence across the HR technology lifecycle—not just "book knowledge."** HRIP affirms that professionals can translate strategy into systems, deliver implementations that stick, and run secure, data-driven operations in the real world.

What HRIP Covers in 2025

HRIP now spans five domains that mirror how HR technology operates—strategy, process design, delivery, run-state excellence, and the learning systems that power skills at scale.

1.0 Technology Strategy and Solutions Assessment

Defines vision, operating model, and roadmaps; evaluates architectures, vendors, and business cases to align HR tech with enterprise goals.

2.0 HR Technology and Business Processes

Designs and optimizes core HR processes and data models; embeds compliance, analytics readiness, and user experience into digitized workflows.

3.0 Systems Selection, Implementations and Upgrades

Runs fit–gap, RFPs, and contracting; leads configuration, integrations, testing, change management, and value realization through go-live and beyond.

4.0 HR Systems Operations & Management

Manages run-state: data quality, privacy and security, governance, release management, service delivery, and analytics operations.

5.0 Learning & Development Systems

Orchestrates LMS/LXP and skills platforms; curates content pipelines, credentials, and AI-assisted learning to enable continuous upskilling and talent mobility.

Mastery across these five domains moves professionals from "system users" to enterprise technologists—opening pathways into HRIS leadership, product ownership, platform governance, people analytics, and L&D systems architecture.

Why It Matters Now

HR is increasingly an intensive technology discipline. Employers are modernizing HCM stacks, automating workflows, and demanding trustworthy people data—requiring HR professionals who are technically fluent and implementation-savvy.

- AI is reshaping employer demand. In a 2025 survey of global employers, two-thirds plan to hire specific AI skills, and 40% expect to reduce roles where tasks can be automated. World Economic Forum+1World Economic Forum Reports

- HR roles remain resilient—and more technical. U.S. employment for HR specialists is projected to grow 8% (2023–2033); HR managers, 6%—both faster than average, with analytics and systems expertise acting as multipliers. Bureau of Labor Statistics+1

Those who pair HR domain knowledge with systems acumen and data literacy are positioned for strategic roles, cross-functional mobility, and leadership tracks that influence operating models—not just processes.

What Sets HRIP Apart

HRIP is experience-forward by design. Study materials support learning, but the credential rewards competence built through projects, operations, and cross-functional delivery.

- Experience over rote recall—practical competence trumps memorization.
- Lifecycle mastery—strategy → selection → implementation → operations → learning systems—instead of narrow topic testing.
- Practitioner-built body of knowledge grounded in real implementations and run-state realities.

HRIP holders signal credibility with IT, Finance, Security, and Legal—unlocking roles where delivery trust, risk management, and change leadership are decisive.

Key Features (At a Glance)

HRIP emphasizes durable, vendor-agnostic capabilities that transfer across platforms and product cycles.

- Practice-anchored knowledge spanning strategy, processes, delivery, operations, and learning platforms.
- Vendor-agnostic principles—architecture, integrations, data, privacy, security, and change.
- Assessment for doers, aligned to real project and run-state scenarios.

These features future-proof careers against platform churn,

boosting marketability for roles that prize systems thinking, interoperability, and data stewardship.

Benefits for Professionals and Employers

HRIP aligns individual growth with enterprise outcomes—reducing risk, improving speed to value, and raising data confidence.

- Career signal with substance for partnering on roadmaps, integrations, analytics, and skills enablement.
- Faster, safer change through disciplined selection, implementation, and governance practices.
- Better decisions from better data via quality, privacy, security, and analytics-ready processes.

Certified professionals gain leverage for promotions and strategic assignments; employers gain trusted operators who shorten the path from vision to measurable results.

Milestones on the HRIP Journey

Progressing toward HRIP mirrors a strong professional development arc—self-assessment, targeted practice, and ongoing application.

- Scope & self-assessment against the five domains.
- Practice-led study plan pairing the guide with on-the-job projects and cross-functional shadowing.
- Exam readiness via scenario-based preparation that reflects delivery and operations.
- Ongoing relevance—apply HRIP practices to releases, upgrades, analytics, and learning-tech roadmaps.

This journey compounds experience into portable expertise, positioning professionals for complex programs (global rollouts, transformations) and long-term leadership in platform operations and learning ecosystems.

Recertification Requires Reasonable Professional Progress

Here's a concise, ready-to-use checklist of HRIP recertification requirements, including how to accumulate Recertification Credit Hours (RCHs) by category if you already earned your HRIP.

Recertification cycle & totals
- Recertify every 3 years by earning 120 RCHs (≈40/year) or by retaking the exam.
- Maintain Reasonable Professional Progress (RPP) by earning at least 20 RCHs per year.
- Submit renewal 60 days before your expiration; include RCH report, renewal fee, and reaffirm the Code of Ethics. Keep documentation for 1 year for possible audit.
- Pay current renewal fee (2025): $150 members / $200 non-members.
- RCH definition: 1 RCH = one didactic hour (≥50 minutes) of relevant learning.

Category 1 — Professional Membership
What counts: Active membership in IHRIM or another HR/IT-related professional society.

IHRIM membership: 7 RCH/year, up to 21 RCH/term as a continuous member in good standing.

Other related associations: 2 RCH/year, up to 6 RCH/term.

Category 2 — Continuing Education / Professional Development

- No cap within this category—all 120 RCHs may be earned here (caps apply to other categories).

- **2A Accredited coursework:**

    1 CEU = 1 RCH (IACET guideline reference).

    One accredited college course: up to 35 RCHs; audited course: up to 17 RCHs; passing grade required.

- **2B IHRIM events:** Annual Conference 22 RCH; 1-day course 8 RCH; ½-day 4 RCH; webinar/convo 1 RCH.

- **2C Other providers (2C):** Calculate 1 RCH per didactic hour; AEPs may issue RCH credits.

Category 3 — Professional Activities (including Volunteer Service)

Overview: Credit for teaching, speaking, publishing, and volunteer leadership tied to HRIT/HRIS.

- **3A Academic teaching:** 4 RCH per course credit; max 20 RCH/year.

- **3B Instructor/Presenter:** IHRIM workshop 8 (full-day) / 4 (half-day); 3 RCH/hour as IHRIM speaker; 2 RCH/hour at other industry events; max 20 RCH/term.

- **3C Author credit:** Example maxima per item—Textbook 20 (author) / 10 (co-author); IHRIM article 10 / 5; other HRIT article 5 / 2; max 60 RCH/term.

- **3D Volunteer service:** Credits for committee and board roles (e.g., IHRIM standing committee member 8; chair 10; non-IHRIM board service 6; ad hoc/content 5; ad hoc/non-content 3).

Category 4 — On-the-Job Experience

- Max 20 RCH/term for learning-intensive HRIT projects (e.g., new system implementation, HR portal build, succession system rollout). 1 RCH per hour up to 20; employer verification and description of new learning required; pre-approval requested.

Reporting & audits

- Track activities on the HRIP Recertification Application & Credit Report Form; report before term ends to avoid suspension; the suspension window allows up to 6 months to cure deficiencies.

Recertification by exam

- As an alternative to accumulating credits, certificate holders may renew by retaking the HRIP exam before their term expires; standard exam fees apply.

Who Thrives with HRIP

HRIP meets practitioners where they work today—and where their careers can grow tomorrow.

- HRIS/HRIT leaders and analysts drive HCM roadmaps, integrations, upgrades, and analytics.

- HR business partners and COE experts seeking deeper technology fluency to digitize and measure processes.

- Project, change, and product managers orchestrating selection, implementation, and adoption.

- L&D technologists and learning product owners building skills platforms and credential ecosystems.

Impact on roles, skills, and careers: Candidates evolve from role specialists to enterprise connectors—bridging HR, IT, and the business—broadening opportunities across product management, transformation offices, analytics leadership, and learning-tech strategy.

Bottom Line

As AI and automation intensify the need for trustworthy data, integrated systems, and continuous upskilling, HRIP distinguishes professionals who can architect, implement, operate, and teach the platforms that power modern HR. It is the credential that rewards experience, validates lifecycle expertise across five domains, and signals readiness to lead technology-enabled people-centric operations. 🔶

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strategic partnership

55x25: The Vision Continues
Celebrating Progress, Fueling the Future

By Sapient Insights Group Staff

Let's start by celebrating what's been built: a stronger, smarter, and more connected HR community that's grown in both confidence and capability. Together, we've sparked a shift by redefining what HR means in the modern workplace and proving that leadership, strategy, and innovation are not just possible, but expected from today's HR functions. And yet, as we arrive at the doorstep of our 55x25 goal, we find ourselves just shy of the mark.
As we process the 2025 survey results, we find that 51% of HR functions are seen as contributing strategic value. This is a big climb from 46% in 2020 so we definitely moved the needle and made measurable, meaningful progress.

Did we hit the precise goal we set? Not yet. But we've come incredibly close, and in doing so, we've built an unshakable foundation for what's to come.

The Real Win: A Strategic Mindset Taking Hold

Our latest research from the 28th Annual HR Systems Survey Report reveals that HR is becoming far more than a process or compliance driven department. HR professionals are more aligned with defined business outcomes than ever before and play a central role in supporting enterprise AI innovations. Nearly 1 in 2 organizations now have a dedicated HR technology function. HR leaders are being brought into strategic conversations before decisions are made, not just being asked to execute after the fact.

Yes, business, talent, and HR outcomes dipped slightly this year, but we are also facing unprecedented complexity: rapidly evolving AI that is reshaping workforce decisions and creating uncertainty; a shifting business landscape with more focus on stock prices, market share; and reducing costs all at the same time – this resulting in a lot of short term thinking. But progress during turbulence isn't a stall, it's a sign of resilience. And we can't wait to share what we heard from the Voice of the Customer on Sep 18 at the HR Tech show in Las Vegas.

Reframing 55x25: From Goal to Guiding Principle

55x25 was never just a goal, it was a catalyst. And while we came close, the real opportunity lies ahead of us. With AI accelerating workplace transformation at an unprecedented pace, we need to think about how we prepare our organizations to lead through what comes next.

For today's HR functions being seen as strategic isn't the finish line, it's the foundation for scaling even greater impact. As we look at 2026 and beyond, we must evolve our thinking from meeting metrics to building adaptability. That means embracing AI not as a replacement for human insight, but as a multiplier of it. HR leaders must be fluent in both human dynamics and emerging technologies, guiding their organizations through continuous, tech-driven change.

The next phase of this journey demands more than strategy—it requires systems-level thinking, ethical use of intelligent tools, and cultures built on trust and transparency. How we respond to and lead with AI will shape the future. Let's not just respond to it, let's be the leaders.

55 BY 25

**VIEWED AS CONTRIBUTING STRATEGIC VALUE
10 YEAR LOOK**

43% (2016), 44% (2017), 45% (2018), 46% (2019), 45% (2020), 46% (2021), 46% (2022), 50% (2023), 52% (2024), 51% (2025)
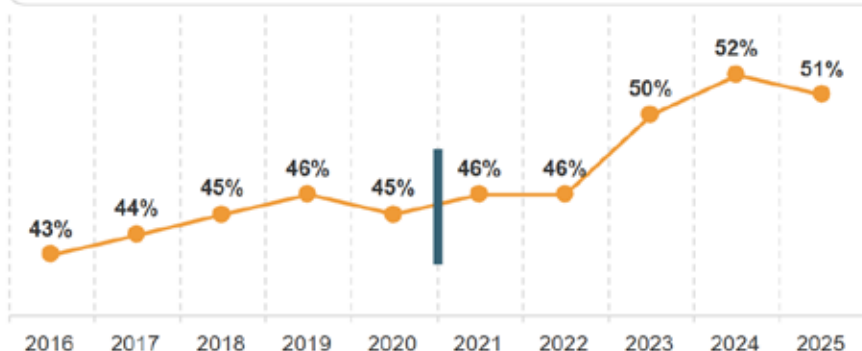
Back to Basics: Laying the Groundwork for AI-Enabled HR

To be ready for the leap ahead, HR leaders must strengthen the fundamentals. Begin with process clarity—streamline and document workflows so they're efficient and automation-ready. Clean and integrate your people data to ensure it is accurate and accessible; poor-quality data doesn't just slow progress, it magnifies bad decisions. Assess your team's skills and capacity to pinpoint where human talent can move into higher-value, strategic work as automation takes over repetitive tasks. Organizations that act now won't just keep pace with change, they'll set it. In a world moving this fast, being ahead isn't optional; it's a competitive necessity.

So, What's Next?

We're putting out new content to help you navigate the changing waters with

- our upcoming Leadership & Change Foundations Research paper launching this fall,

- the release of the 28th Annual HR Systems Survey with all the scoop on the current business of HR, HR tech, and emerging technology and practices,

- and we're refreshing our insights into the SMB and Contingent Workforce markets — exploring the shifting landscape of small business, the rapid evolution of their HR needs, and the strategies shaping the next generation of workforce models. 🌐

Ready to Level Up?

Building a more strategic HR function wasn't luck, it was leadership. But going further will take new skills, smarter systems, and a strategic mindset built for the AI era. If you're ready to build the capabilities that move your HR function from tactical to transformational, we're here to help.

Let's talk about what leveling up looks like for you. Scan the QR code below to schedule a meeting.

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Accelerating Expertise in HR Tech:
Introducing IHRIM's AXIS™ Mentoring Program

By IHRIM Staff

Abstract

HR technology roles are expanding faster than most organizations can train. Systems selection and implementation now intersect with data privacy, analytics, AI-inflected processes, and global compliance—pressures that can overwhelm even strong practitioners. IHRIM's AXIS™ (Accelerating eXpertise through Integrated Support) Mentoring Program was created by member-experts to meet this moment with a structured, relationship-centered pathway that turns potential into performance.

Over 18 months—typically February through October across two consecutive years—mentors and mentees meet monthly to map skills, close gaps, and apply proven practices across the HR technology lifecycle. The curriculum spans five domains: Technology Strategy & Solutions Assessment; HR Technology & Business Processes; Systems Selection, Implementation & Maintenance; HR Systems Operations; and Learning & Development Solutions.

A dedicated platform, assessment tools, and domain checklists guide progress; completion earns the mentee a certificate and formal commendation. Beyond mastering tools and methods, AXIS develops judgment—tacit, experience-borne know-how that's often unavailable inside one employer's walls. In a profession where trustworthy data, resilient operations, and sound governance determine outcomes, AXIS strengthens the whole ecosystem: mentees accelerate careers, mentors refresh their edge, and employers gain confident contributors who deliver value sooner. This article introduces the program structure, topics, and the professional standards—respect, trust, and confidentiality—that make mentoring work.

Why mentoring—why now

HR technology has become a high-stakes discipline: strategy, architecture, integration, analytics, privacy, and operations all move in lockstep. AXIS is built for this complexity. It pairs seasoned HR tech leaders with growth-oriented professionals in a formal, goal-driven relationship that improves satisfaction, speeds career progress, and raises performance—benefits consistently observed in the mentorship literature and reflected in IHRIM's design.

What AXIS is

AXIS—Accelerating eXpertise through Integrated Support—is IHRIM's structured professional mentorship for HR Technology practitioners. It combines a clear roadmap, monthly cadence, and curated resources with a relationship model that blends career development (planning, choices, visibility) and practice development (role-modeling, decision patterns, and judgment).

Duration and cadence

The standard AXIS engagement spans 18 months: monthly mentor–mentee meetings over two consecutive years, generally February through October, with a blackout period November–January to respect year-end workload. Programs beginning in other months follow the same count and avoid the blackout window. Meetings typically run one to two hours, in person or virtual, with explicit commitments to scheduling and progress.

What you'll learn: the comprehensive domains

The curriculum covers five domains aligned to the HR technology lifecycle,

each with topics, activities, and deliverables:

1. **Technology Strategy & Solutions Assessment** (business cases, delivery models, governance, ROI).

2. **HR Technology & Business Processes** (core HCM, talent, integrations, workflows, analytics).

3. **Systems Selection, Implementation & Maintenance** (requirements, vendor evaluation, project management, change management, testing).

4. **HR Systems Operations** (analytics, documentation, data management, records/retention, BC/DR, security & privacy, lifecycle management).

5. **Learning & Development Solutions** (modern L&D strategies, systems, and content governance).

Tools include a skills assessment, 18 conversation topics with checklists, a career-path map, and a customizable mentorship roadmap. Hundreds of examples and templates from business case to incident logs and more are included each month. When a specific need arises for a deeper understanding, the mentor may exercise discretion and invite other experts to a topical meeting for the mentee's benefit.

How the relationship works

AXIS defines clear roles. **Mentors**—often HRIP-certified professionals—bring deep domain experience, communication skill, and boundary-aware coaching. They meet monthly, transfer knowledge deliberately, track progress against the roadmap, and, when helpful, introduce additional experts. **Mentees** own their growth: they set goals, prepare, practice, seek feedback, and document learning. Both parties commit to a respectful cadence and to using the AXIS

platform to record milestones.

Three foundations make the relationship effective: **respect** (entering with positive regard), **reciprocal trust** ("earned in drops, lost in buckets"), and **absolute confidentiality** (a promise that enables candor and real growth). AXIS also outlines four stages— **Initiate, Cultivate, Separate, Differentiate**—so partners launch well, do the work, close cleanly, and decide how to continue collegially afterward.

Skills your employer may not offer

Because organizations specialize, many practitioners never see the "full stack" of HR technology practice. AXIS deliberately broadens exposure. Mentees tackle activities employers may not prioritize internally—building business cases and ROI models; comparing delivery methods and total cost of ownership; drafting governance and data-ownership policies; designing release-management and BC/DR practices; mapping vendor demos and SLAs; interpreting global privacy regimes; and structuring L&D content systems. The result is portable competence: the ability to assess, select, implement, and operate systems in varied environments.

Platform, resources, and outcomes

AXIS runs on IHRIM's mentoring platform with built-in assessment, topic checklists, and templates for roadmaps, projects, and documentation. On successful completion, mentees receive a certificate co-signed by the IHRIM Board and their mentor, plus a formal commendation letter—useful credentials for internal promotion or market mobility. Mentors gain renewed perspective, expanded networks, and the satisfaction of shaping the next generation.

Getting started

Applications for mentors and mentees will be accepted year-round, but the inaugural enrollment period runs from September 15, 2025 through December 15, 2025 with a program start date in February 2026. Prospective mentees and mentors begin with an orientation, skills inventory, and roadmap draft aligned to the 18-month timeline. The first working session then moves directly into prioritized topics. Regular reviews ensure continuity and make it easy to adjust depth and sequence as needs evolve. If either party must end early, IHRIM provides a structured transition to protect the mentee's progress.

Getting started

AXIS™ turns ambition into capability and delivers outcomes your day job may never expose you to. The benefits are proportional to commitment:

- **18-month, mentor-guided path** that compresses learning cycles and builds full-stack HR technology judgment.

- **Clear roadmap + monthly cadence** across comprehensive domains: strategy and solutions assessment; selection and implementation; operations and analytics; security and privacy; and L&D.

- **Real outcomes beyond the day job:** portable skills, credible work products, and a certificate signaling readiness to lead.

- **Credential advantage:** completion of AXIS reduces the **HRIP** minimum experience requirement from 5 to 3 years.

If you're ready to move from busy to effective, enroll as a mentee to accelerate your career, or step up as a mentor and help shape the next generation of HR technology leaders. Contact IHRIM via our website www. IHRIM.org or email Information@ IHRIM.org 🟠

Growing Success Through Motivational Relationships

By Krisann Pergande, Ph.D. and Dennis Hill, Ph.D., HRIP

Abstract

HR leaders are navigating AI disruption, multigenerational teams, and post pandemic resets while still being accountable for measurable performance. This article offers an evidence-based framework—motivational relationships—that pairs relational leadership with goal clarity and progress visibility.

Drawing on established research in goal setting, self-determination, psychological safety, employee voice, strengths-based development, and recognition, it outlines practical steps HR can apply in any sector to accelerate learning and engagement. A brief case example illustrates how shifting from blame to shared goals, rewarding progress (not just outcomes), and scaffolding support for lower performing groups can lift culture and results. The piece closes with measurement guidance for HR analytics and technology teams.

From Blame to Learning

Organizations frequently default to blame when results lag. A more productive path is to create conditions where employees feel safe to surface issues, ask for help, and experiment. Psychological safety—shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking—predicts learning behaviors and better performance.[1] HR can sponsor manager training that models curiosity over judgment and uses retrospectives to normalize learning from missteps.

Co-Creating Goals and Making Progress Visible

Clear, specific, and challenging goals consistently improve performance, when employees understand the how and the why.[2] Inviting employees into the goal setting process increases commitment and fitness to local realities. Fair procedures around goal review build acceptance.[3] To sustain momentum, make small wins legible: frequent check ins, short cycles, and lightweight dashboards that highlight progress signals. Recognizing incremental progress is one of the strongest day-to-day motivators and is a reliable driver of creative and productive work.[4]

Motivation Through Autonomy, Competence, and Connection

Motivation deepens when work design and managerial practices support autonomy (discretion over how to achieve goals), competence (skill growth and feedback), and relatedness (trusting relationships).[5] HR can weave these needs into role design, coaching, and learning pathways. Doing so shifts energy from compliance to commitment.

Strengths-Based Development, Fairness, and Voice

A strengths-based lens focuses development on what people do well while respectfully closing gaps.[6] Pair this with procedural fairness and employee voice, two conditions that improve buy in, effort, and discretionary contributions.[7] In practice: include employees in shaping team level objectives, publish the criteria used for decisions, and invite structured input (e.g., working groups, listening sessions, and idea pipelines). Voice without follow through erodes trust; close the loop publicly.

Recognize Progress and Scaffold Support

Recognition programs work best when they reinforce desired behaviors, are timely and specific, and include more than the top performers. When recognition highlights progress—especially among those historically overlooked—it refreshes purpose and resets norms.[4] Team-based recognition can also raise engagement and effort.[8]

Alongside recognition, provide

targeted support for cohorts that are behind (coaching, micro learning, peer mentoring) while preserving dignity and expectations.

Case Illustration (Education, Generalizable Cross Industry)

Drawing on the author's implementation in a large urban school, the leadership team replaced blame with progress-focused routines and formalized "motivational relationships."[9] Contextually, the cohort began as the district's lowest performing group and included a high proportion of students with special education designations. Actions included: co-creating clear annual goals with staff and students; assessing monthly milestones, troubleshooting weekly, to strategically adjust instruction and assignments; making progress visible through building wide reminders, short cycles, and public rituals; broadening recognition from a few top performers to specific, timely acknowledgments for effort and improvement; and mobilizing targeted support (coaching, peer mentoring, and micro learning) for cohorts that lagged, without lowering standards.

Empirical outcomes. Within nine months or one academic year, the cohort posted the largest gains in standardized test scores district wide and achieved a 97% completion rate, moving nearly all students on to high school. Participation increased, resistance diminished, and the culture normalized learning, voice, and shared accountability. While the particulars are educational, the underlying mechanisms—psychological safety, shared goals, progress visibility, recognition, and targeted support—are portable to corporate, healthcare, and public sector environments.

Measurement and Technology Implications for HR

Define leading indicators. Pair outcome metrics (e.g., throughput, quality, completion) with progress signals (e.g., cycle time reductions, skill attainment, participation in feedback loops).

Capture autonomy and fairness signals. Use short pulse items on decision influence, clarity of criteria, and psychological safety, link to team outcomes.

Instrument recognition. Track distribution equity and specificity of recognition and tie to engagement and performance trends.

Leverage AI carefully. Use AI to summarize goals, surface patterns, or personalize learning paths, while keeping humans responsible for relationships, coaching, and judgment.

Practical Checklist for HR Leaders

- Replace blame language with learning questions in all performance rituals.
- Co-create specific, challenging goals; publish review cadences and criteria.
- Make progress visible weekly; celebrate small wins.
- Design jobs and learning to satisfy autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
- Build strengths while closing gaps; invite voice and close the loop.
- Recognize progress broadly, scaffold support for lagging cohorts. 🔶

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Dr. Krisann Pergande is an educator, instructional leader, and researcher dedicated to advancing learning and literacy. Recognized for disruptive, practical methods that outperform traditional techniques, she delivers measurable gains in reading, speech, and learning for learners of all ages and abilities. Her approach is detailed in Sound Symbols: Speaking and Reading Approach (2018). She can be reached at *https://www.ReadingSymbols.com*

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Miller's *Immortal HR:* An Allegory in Eight Parts
Part I. Introducing the Cast of *Immortal HR*
By IHRIM Staff

Abstract

Marc S. Miller, author of *Immortal HR* and the earlier allegory *The Death of HR: Who Killed Ms. H (Harriet) R. (Rose) Job?* presents a renewed examination of the modern human resources function through a cast of named characters and an eight-part analytical series. This introduction orients readers to the narrative devices, clarifies what each character represents, and explains how the installments move from background to practice, from recovery to renewal, and from tactics to long-horizon strategy.

At the center of Miller's books stands **Ms. H. R. Job (Harriet Rose Job),** the personification of the profession itself. In Miller's framing, she is neither an abstract department nor a compliance checklist; she is the evolving capacity of organizations to convene talent, protect continuity, and convert people intelligence into enterprise value. If earlier observers pronounced HR "dead," Miller argues that subsequent shocks revealed her indispensability. The catalytic force in that reversal is **Ms. Connie Vid (Covid),** a character whose very name compresses a

global event that exposed fragility in health, safety, and work design, and thereby revealed the organization's reliance on people systems, data, and coordinated change.

Threading the story is **Detective Miller**, the investigator and guide. His role is not to sermonize but to surface clues: where the data live, why the signals were missed, how decisions were made, and which interventions worked. Detective Miller's task in this series is to triangulate evidence from characters, programs, and outcomes, then present the findings in a sequence executives can use.

Surrounding Ms. H. R. Job is a chorus of stakeholders, each representing a structural interest in the enterprise. **Mr. Hugh Resources** stands for the legacy view of HR—policy-centered, administratively focused, and often underfunded. **Sue "Sis" Stems** personifies the systems that

connect people, process, and data; she is the nervous system whose integration level sets the ceiling on HR's speed and sophistication. Ms. **Cher Holder** speaks for capital and owners; her questions are about return, risk, and durable advantage. **Juan Managemento** represents the line's mandate to execute; his attention toggles between short-cycle productivity and mid-cycle capability building. **Ed Konomy** keeps the macro context in view— labor markets, inflation, and the

business cycle. **Rob Otics** is the face of automation and robotics, a reminder that work is being reframed as tasks that can be decomposed, augmented, or automated. **Mel Lenial** and **Bebe Boomer** anchor the intergenerational realities of today's workforce, insisting that policy, technology, and culture fit a multigenerational user base.

In later chapters the cast deepens to include explicit collaborators in applied analytics and AI. **Mr. Chet G. PeTee** and **Arturo Intelligenti** appear when Ms. H. R. Job moves from insight as narrative to insight as instrument. They are not mystical oracles; they are the tools and techniques that translate data into prediction, simulation, and decision support. Their presence marks the point at which HR's conviction is tested by its willingness to operationalize algorithms in a governed, human-centered way.

To transform allegory into a usable roadmap, Miller organizes the series into eight parts, each installment self-contained, together forming a flowing analysis.

Installment 1: Background.

The opening chapter reframes the journey from "death" to "immortality." Detective Miller recounts how Ms. Connie Vid (Covid) exposed the fragility of business-as-usual and how Ms. H. R. Job recast her role from backstage to mission-critical. Readers meet the core cast and see the stakes: continuity, care, and competitive advantage. The background is not nostalgia; it is the baseline against which progress and remaining gaps are measured.

Installment 2: The Mindset Shift.

Miller then details the shift that enables progress: Ms. H. R. Job moves from custodianship of transactions to stewardship of decisions. The narrative references nine Mindsets without enumerating them; the emphasis is on practice rather than taxonomy. Evidence becomes the language of leadership; smartphone-first experiences, dashboards, and feedback loops become the medium through which HR's value is seen, not merely asserted.

Installment 3: The Six Working Groups.

The third chapter turns strategy into structure. Miller introduces six Working Groups that give Ms. H. R. Job leverage: People Analytics (Working Group A) pairs with HR

Technology (Working Group E) to instrument the enterprise; DEI&B (Working Group B) builds listening and accountability; Well-being and Human-centered Leadership (Working Group C) protect capacity; Talent Management and Leadership Development (Working Group D) build future capability; and the Hybrid-work policy group codifies flexibility. Here **Mr. Chet G. PeTee** and **Arturo Intelligenti** step onstage as partners in responsible AI and visualization.

Installment 4: The First 100 Days—Technology Triage.

Miller distills the early-crisis playbook: health monitoring and contact-tracing; remote collaboration and virtual meetings; project-management scaffolds; secure remote access and facility entry; wellness applications; virtual onboarding; engagement platforms; cloud file sharing; and e-learning. The lesson is pragmatic—sequence matters, governance matters, and user experience determines adoption.

Installment 5: Year One to Two—Policies, Communication, and Workforce Analytics.

As volatility stabilizes, operating rhythms mature. The series documents vaccination initiatives, upgraded health and safety protocols, expanded mental-health support, and continued investment in networks, cloud, and cybersecurity. Leadership communication becomes systematic; analytics extend from turnover to flight-risk and sentiment, linking action to measurable effects.

Installment 6: Three Years On—The New Normal.

Miller identifies what endured: hybrid work and flexibility, sustained attention to health and well-being, and steady technology investment. Talent strategies

rebalance toward retention and capability; recruiting is redesigned; labor sources diversify; resilience and contingency planning are formalized; Digital Experience (DX) expands beyond HR; sustainability and stakeholder engagement move from aspiration to expectation.

Installment 7: 2025 and Beyond—Generative AI, EX/DX, and People Analytics.

The forward view is neither hype nor fear. The series situates day-to-day use of generative AI across industries; the persistent attraction of hybrid work; human-centered leadership; vendor solutions with embedded AI; the rise of DX; and the pervasiveness of People Analytics as a genuine strategy engine. Governance, and all its components of bias, regulation, intellectual property, and model risk,isrisk, is treated as a leadership function, not an afterthought.

Installment 8: What HR Must Do Next.

The finale converts narrative into imperatives: strengthen cross-functional collaboration; increase HR-technology investment; expand smartphone-first experiences and dashboards; prioritize well-being and work/life balance; design compelling onboarding and EX/UX; redirect effort from administration to value creation; encourage community engagement; sustain a reasonable focus on DEI&B; and safeguard data access and cybersecurity. Measurable outcomes and named owners anchor the call to action.

Across the series, the characters are not caricatures but lenses. **Mr. Hugh Resources** and **Sue "Sis" Stems** remind readers that governance and integration determine throughput; **Ms. Cher Holder** keeps the capital lens front and center; **Juan Managemento** connects strategy to execution; **Ed Konomy** situates decisions in markets; **Rob Otics** tests assumptions about task design; **Mel Lenial** and **Bebe Boomer** ensure inclusion and usability across generations; **Mr. Chet G.**

PeTee and **Arturo Intelligenti** help the enterprise move from descriptive reporting to predictive and prescriptive insight. Under Detective Miller's scrutiny, their interactions reveal an operating model in which Ms. H. R. Job is not merely revived but genuinely **immortal**, not in the sense of invulnerability, but in the sense of renewed relevance through adaptation, evidence, and design.

This introduction therefore sets readers' expectations. Each installment stands alone for busy executives yet builds on the prior one to form a coherent arc: from context to capability, from crisis to cadence, and from possibility to practice. The aim is practical scholarship, an account as disciplined as it is usable, so that the next time Ms. Connie Vid (Covid) or her cousin by another name arrives, the enterprise is better prepared, Ms. H. R. Job is already at the table, and the story Detective Miller tells is one of deliberate readiness rather than forced recovery.

About the Author

Marc S. Miller, Founder and President of Marc S. Miller Associates, is a nationally known independent consultant on technology solutions for Human Resources. His consulting firm, now in its 38th year, his industry visibility, and New Yorker attitude have made Miller one of the HR Technology industry's most recognized, invigorating, and creative voices. He is a featured speaker and presenter at numerous HR and HCM technology meetings, including industry-focused events and HRMS providers' User Conferences. He is a founding member of the NYC IHRIM Association chapter. In 1995, he received IHRIM's highest National award, its "Summit Award" for overall industry contributions. Miller has written three books, and the first, *Heroic HR, The Death of HR: Who Killed H. (Harriet) R. (Rose) Job?* is now in its second edition. His books are available at www.marcsmiller.com/books.

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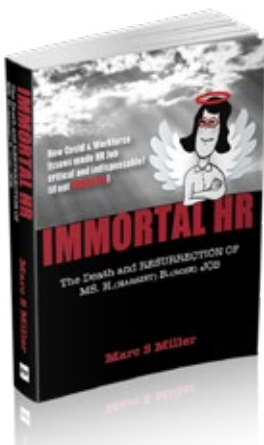
Rocky Roads or Smooth Sailing?
Effects of Uncertainty on Benefit Management

By Katherine Jones, Ph.D.

Abstract

This article examines how renewed U.S. tariffs and macroeconomic uncertainty transmit through firm finances to employment, prices, and employer-sponsored benefits. Higher input costs and softer demand compress benefits budgets, with healthcare a critical channel given dependence on imported drugs, devices, and components. Consequences include higher premiums and cost sharing, foregone care, presenteeism, and financial stress—eroding engagement and retention. The article outlines an HR response: targeted COLA and incentives; value-focused benefits redesign (narrow networks, telehealth); financial-wellness support; flexible policies and transparent communication; and upskilling/internal mobility to mitigate layoffs. Proactive, data-driven actions preserve total rewards amid policy shocks.

Introduction

Somewhere between market volatility, accelerated worker stress, and supply chain unknowns we have the HR professional trying to manage competitive benefits strategies with the likely mandate to lower or at least contain overall costs. Benefits are a major tool in recruitment and retention, especially with Gen Z and Millennials prioritizing purpose, flexibility, and financial wellness. In the recent past, employers are adding or expanding things like pet insurance, student loan repayment, tuition reimbursement, fertility/family-building benefits, and until recently, DEI-aligned programs. While current employees grapple with engagement, well-being, and overall job satisfaction issues, they have also been led to expect customizable or personalized benefits based on their life stage, family needs, or health.

Then we have tariffs.

The results for benefit managers and those they serve can be far reaching, initiating a set of very real additional challenges. The tariffs create unpredictability in the market, making businesses cautious about their budgets and consumers cautious about their spending. While tariffs are not universally a direct lever on employee benefits, the ripple effect through inflation, business costs, and economic uncertainty can absolutely influence how benefits are designed, funded, and perceived by employees. This could result in scaled-back benefits offerings or a shift to less comprehensive plans.

While the direct link between tariffs and benefits costs is not always clear, that ripple (in some cases, a torrent) affects company finances and economic stability which can lead to changes in how benefits are structured or funded. Tariffs raise the price of imported goods and materials, which can lead to higher production costs for businesses. To offset these expenses, companies might reduce spending on employee benefits like health insurance, retirement plans, or paid leave. Vulnerable areas like training may get budget reductions. Higher prices for goods due to tariffs can reduce consumer spending, affecting company revenues. In response, businesses might cut costs in areas like employee benefits.

Effects on Employment Numbers

Tariffs, such as those implemented by the Trump administration in 2025, can have significant effects on employment numbers. For example, analyses from Yale's Budget Lab estimate that the U.S. will have 770,000 fewer jobs by the end of 2025 due to the current tariff regime. The same analysis projects a 0.6 percentage

point rise in the unemployment rate by the end of 2025.

According to AXIOS, manufacturers expect dismal business conditions that could plunge the sector back into a recessionary-like state. While the trade war was apparently intended to revitalize domestic factories by discouraging the consumption of foreign-made goods, surveys show that manufacturers expect the opposite: less expansion, plummeting sales, job cuts and higher prices.

Volvo Group, as one example, announced plans to lay off between 550 and 800 workers at three U.S. facilities over the next three months, citing declining demand and market uncertainty attributed largely to trade tariffs. Why? Virtually no cars made in the U.S. are built entirely with U.S.-made parts. Even car and heavy trucks assembled in the United States typically include a mix of domestic and international components. To be competitive, modern auto manufacturing relies on a global supply chain. Consisting of, on average, 30,000 parts per car, today's parts often include parts from Mexico, Canada, Japan, Germany, South Korea, and China — especially electronics, drivetrain components, and wiring systems. The American Automobile Labeling Act, which requires automakers to disclose what percentages of parts are made in the US and Canada, reports that even the most "American" vehicles — like the Tesla Model Y, Jeep Cherokee, or Ford Mustang — only contain 60% to 75% U.S./Canadian content.

A Goldman Sachs analysis indicates that broad-based tariffs lead to a net decrease in employment, with a 10-percentage-point increase in tariffs causing an overall employment decline. While the analysis did not define a timeline, they note that the estimate does not take into account the possibility of a recession, which would also be a hit to employment.

Impact on HR

Clearly pending layoffs affect the work of the HR team: not only the pain of eliminating people, addressing severance and buy-out options, but also the reallocation of jobs and people to address the work that has to be done. Much of manufacturing depends on semi-skilled labor where job loss requires education on employee options for healthcare for the workers and their families.

The Health Care Conundrum

According to a recent study by Forbes, two-thirds (2/3) of American employees name employer-covered healthcare as the most important benefit in considering whether to take a job, hence the impact of tariffs on medical devices and pharmaceuticals affects corporate and employee insurance costs and spending power. Medical Economics reports that the proposed tariffs could impact 75% of U.S.-marketed medical devices, affecting prices and accessibility due to foreign manufacturing. Consider even something as simple as surgical gloves: U.S. medical facilities are highly reliant on foreign suppliers

with fewer than 1% of gloves being produced domestically.

As of 2019, over 50% of medical equipment and supplies used in the U.S. were imported, with Europe and Asia being major contributors. Hospitals annually spend billions on major equipment and technology—the majority of which is manufactured outside of the U.S.: Equipment such as ventilators, anesthesia machines, X-ray equipment, and state-of-the-art CT and MRI scanners used in the United States either are manufactured abroad or contain significant foreign components.

According to the American Hospital Association, medical supply expenses, which make up approximately 10.5% of the average hospital's budget, collectively accounted for $146.9 billion in 2023, an increase of $6.6 billion over 2022. The current tariffs on Chinese-made semiconductors solar cells, syringes and needles will increase to 50% from the 25% they were last summer. Tariffs on batteries, face masks, medical gloves, graphite, other critical minerals, permanent magnets, steel and aluminum products will increase to 25%; many of these items were at up to a 7.5% tariff previously.

Black Book Market Research, a healthcare research and analysis firm, conducted a survey of 200 healthcare industry experts in late January 2025. 82% of respondents reported they expect tariff-related import expenses to increase hospital and health system costs by 15% in the next six months. Renton, Wash.-based Providence Health estimates that the tariffs could increase costs by $10 million to $25 million annually after evaluating their potential impact on access to life-saving medical supplies and equipment.

Access to affordable drugs is another issue: 90% of prescriptions are generic drugs or biosimilars, according to the Association for Accessible Medicines, which represents generic drugmakers. About 80% of generics are finished in foreign countries,

with even more getting their active pharmaceutical ingredient from outside the U.S., according to Stephen W. Schondelmeyer, co-principal investigator of the Resilient Drug Supply Project at the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy. "In contrast to brand-name drugs, which are largely made in Europe, generic products and their API are typically made in Asian countries such as India, China, Japan, Singapore, and others," Schondelmeyer reported in 2022.

Impact on HR

Faced with rising healthcare costs, employees could make two undesirable choices: go without the drugs or care they need, thereby potentially facing devastating costs later, or increasingly come to work when ill. Lack of opportunities for access to care also creates increased absenteeism for the employee, especially if they are also the family caregiver.

Potential solutions include considering narrower provider networks and looking for cheaper or digital-first alternatives such as telehealth and AI-powered wellness apps. If take-home pay stagnates, increasing deductibles or copays can prove an additional hardship for employees.

Rising Consumer Costs Affect Everyone

New tariffs have had a significant impact on consumer goods, primarily by increasing prices. Tariffs act as a tax on imported goods, and businesses—themselves consumers—often pass these costs onto consumers. For example, the tariffs on Chinese imports, which can reach up to 145%, will lead to higher prices for electronics, clothing, toys and other everyday items.

Small businesses, in particular, struggle to absorb these costs, which can lead to reduced product availability and even higher prices due to scarcity. Additionally, the overall price level for consumer

goods has risen, with some estimates suggesting a 2.9% increase in the short term.

The decline in average real disposable income per household so far is $4689.00 That is a lot for a lower income family. Groceries, which were a campaign issue, will rise: consider coffee, surely a business place staple; the only native sources are Hawaii and Puerto Rico—most is imported. Consumers will be less likely to build or buy new homes, as costs not only of building but of appliances increase. Restaurant prices, which on the whole have gone up post-pandemic in part because of labor costs, will again rise as food and alcohol cost and ingredient scarcity ensue. Conversely, U.S. companies that rely on international exports are also hit with tariffs and U.S. backlash (Canada is reputed to have removed U.S. imports from stores' shelves). The corresponding loss of revenue will affect employment numbers and, very likely, benefit offerings in those affected businesses.

The broader economic impact includes reduced GDP growth and potential job losses.

Steps for HR

Rising prices—often associated with inflation—can significantly impact employees' financial well-being, which in turn affects morale, productivity, and retention. This highlights the need for HR organizations to address stress, foster engagement, and support work-life balance to improve overall employee well-being. Here are some practical steps HR can take:

1. **Conduct a Compensation Review**
   • Benchmark salaries against industry standards to ensure competitiveness.
   • Adjust salaries for cost-of-living increases where possible, especially in high-inflation environments.
   • Consider targeted raises for lower-income employees most affected by rising costs.

2. Enhance Benefits Packages
- Introduce or improve transportation subsidies, meal allowances, or housing support.
- Offer discount programs for groceries, fuel, or other essentials.
- Partner with financial institutions to provide low-interest loans or emergency funds.

3. Provide Financial Wellness Programs
- Offer financial literacy workshops on budgeting, debt management, and saving.
- Provide access to financial advisors or planning tools.
- Implement employee assistance programs (EAPs) for holistic support, including mental health.

4. Increase Flexibility
- Promote remote or hybrid work to save on commuting and meals.
- Introduce flexible scheduling to reduce childcare costs or help employees pursue side income.

5. Communicate Transparently
- Keep employees informed about company policies, financial health, and the rationale behind decisions.
- Create forums for employee feedback and open dialogue on financial concerns.

6. Offer Performance-Based Incentives
- Short-term bonuses, profit-sharing, or spot rewards can help bridge financial gaps.
- Tie incentives to productivity or cost-saving initiatives to benefit both company and employee.

7. Support Career Development
- Provide training and upskilling programs to help employees move into higher-paying roles.
- Encourage internal mobility to retain talent and reduce hiring costs.

The tariffs create unpredictability in the market, making businesses justifiably cautious about their budgets. While this could result in scaled-back benefits offerings or a shift to less comprehensive plans, HR departments play a critical role in helping mitigate these effects. 🟠

About the Author

Unique as a thought leader for her ability to make theory actionable and technology comprehensible to non-technologists, Dr. Jones is a sought-after writer and speaker worldwide. As a partner at Mercer, she was previously responsible for creating and providing thought leadership content for a web-based membership program. She spent several years at Bersin & Associates, where she was the VP heading the HCM technology research practice in Bersin by Deloitte. An industry veteran and independent high-tech analyst, she is widely published on talent management and personnel-related technologies, cybersecurity, ERP, and HCM systems implementations, change management, and the mid-market, totaling over 500 works in print. Her master's and doctorate degrees are from Cornell University. She can be reached at *linkedin.com/in/drkatherinejones.*

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