

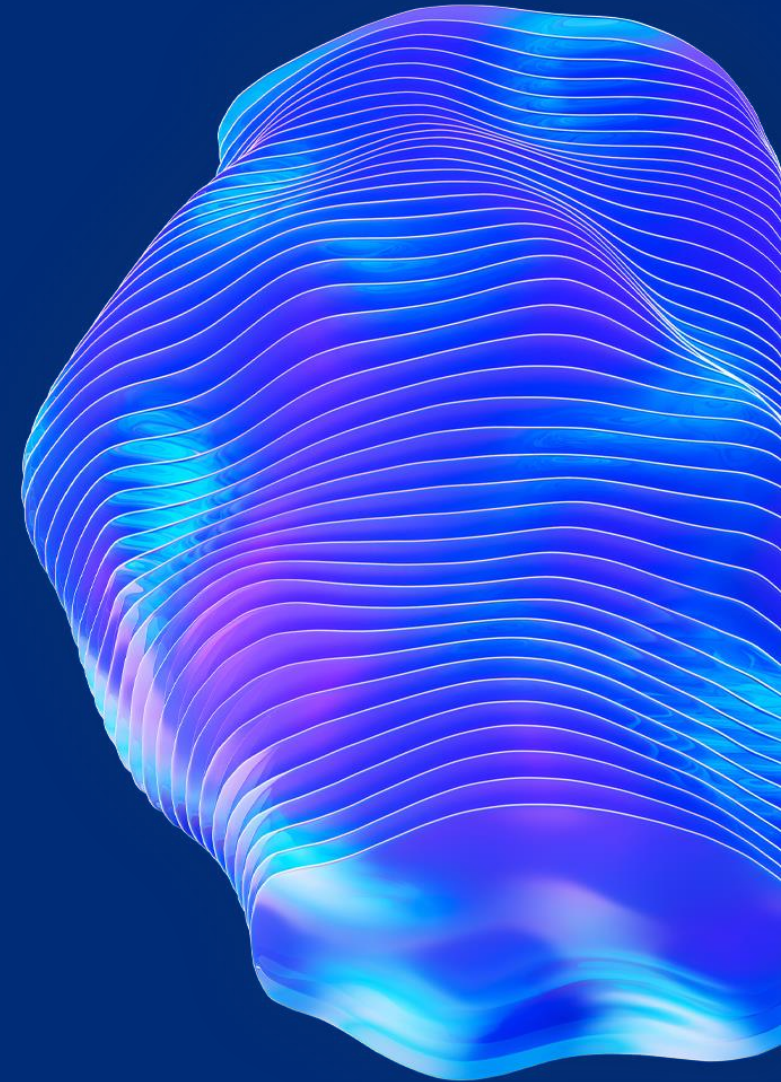
Beyond the Hype: Reflections from the HR Tech Conference

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The HR Tech Conference 2025 just wrapped up, bringing together thousands of HR professionals, tech vendors, and thought leaders. This year's event underscored a critical theme: while the pace of AI innovation is accelerating, many organizations are struggling to keep up. The disconnect between the rapid development of AI solutions and the readiness of HR teams to take advantage of them was more pronounced than ever.

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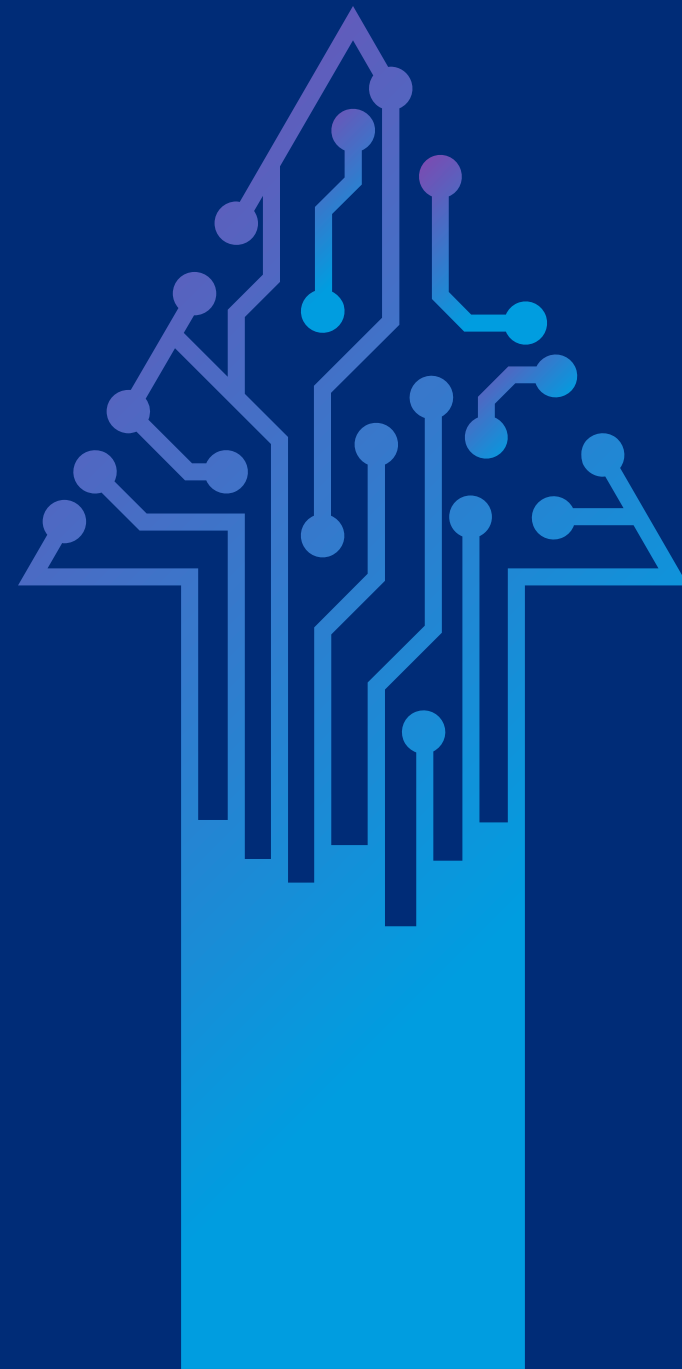


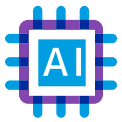


Introduction

The HR Tech Conference serves as a vital platform for exploring the future of human resources technology. This year, the expo hall was alive with vendors eager to showcase their latest AI-driven solutions, from recruitment tools to benefits selection offerings to employee engagement platforms. However, amidst the excitement, a prevailing sentiment emerged: while AI is everywhere, are organizations truly prepared to leverage its potential?

The audience was a mix of HR leaders and practitioners eager to learn, and tech vendors ready to meet their needs, creating a rich environment for discussion. Yet, many attendees expressed feeling overwhelmed by the sheer volume of AI options available, highlighting a critical gap between innovation and practical application that needs to be bridged for the market to advance.





The AI readiness gap

AI was a dominant theme at this year's conference, with many vendors showcasing AI. Serving as the tip of the spear for where innovation is happening, the startup competition **Pitchfest** highlighted this trend in full force with nearly every participant showing off their "AI-powered solutions". SonicJobs and Spirence took the winning spots this year, representing AI tools aimed at transforming recruitment and mental wellness support.

However, a closer look reveals that many of these innovations are merely scratching the surface. They represent AI applied to existing processes, making them a little better, faster, or smarter, but not yet fundamentally changing the way things are done. Recruitment still follows traditional methods, and mental health resources are sought in similar ways, albeit now often facilitated by AI bots to help **scale** these processes.

Even with these incremental advancements, HR professionals expressed **a mix of excitement and overwhelm**. The rapid pace of AI development is outstripping the ability of many organizations to adapt. As they grapple with the influx of new tools and technologies, the reality is that most organizations are not structurally equipped to keep pace with the speed of AI evolution. This disconnect between the innovation being presented and the readiness of HR teams to implement it creates an undercurrent of tension. Organizations are eager to embrace AI, yet they find themselves struggling to integrate these advancements into their established frameworks, highlighting a critical need for foundational work before diving deeper into AI adoption.



The need for foundational work

The conference highlighted a critical need for organizations to focus on foundational work before diving headfirst into AI adoption. The rapid pace of feature development in the market can create a false sense of urgency, leading organizations to implement solutions without the necessary infrastructure or cultural readiness.

HR leaders must recognize that true transformation requires more than just adopting the latest technology; it demands a shift in mindset and culture. Organizations need to create environments that support experimentation, encourage learning, and prioritize human oversight in AI applications.

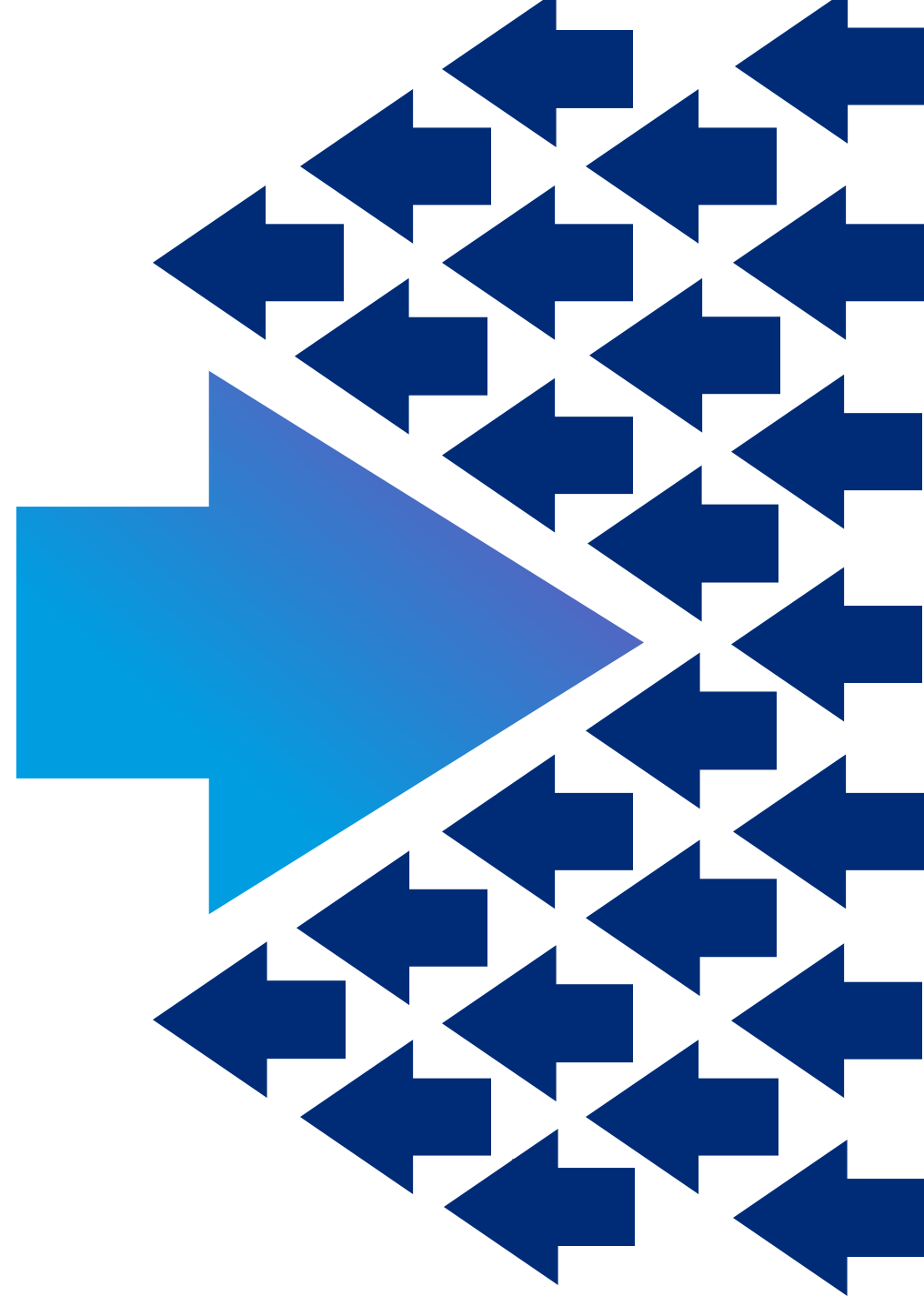




Celebrating forward momentum

Despite the disconnect in AI readiness, both HR organizations and HR tech vendors alike were eager to showcase their progress.

Products like Paradox's Immersive Job Previews, ADP Lyric HCM, and Degreed's Maestro (AI-powered learning agent) were all on display via [the Top HR Products of the Year Awards](#). On top of that, HR teams themselves received the spotlight in the first-ever [HR Icons Awards](#). Teams from Dow, Marriott International, Johnson Controls, Avery Dennison and more took home awards honoring them for their efforts to build strong workplace culture, drive employee engagement, develop talent, and ultimately transform HR.





Innovations to watch

Several innovations stood out at the conference, particularly those addressing the needs of frontline employees, whose needs continue to be front of mind for HR leaders in many industries; and for tech that's meeting modern challenges head-on:

- **Fountain** offers agentic AI that automate the frontline journey to assist with everything from recruiting to workforce management for the frontline workforce.
- **Flockity** brings a refreshing take on recruiting, leveraging influencer marketing to drive better, more engaged applicants to open roles.
- **Marovi** showcased how AI could level the playing field for executive recruiting firms and corporate recruiting teams by intelligently scaling the executive hiring research process.
- **Fama** is tackling the complexities of background checks in the digital age, where online reputations can pose real risks for business.
- **Acorn** is working to connect the dots between learning and performance with personalized development plans, performance history and succession planning.



Our advice

To HR tech vendors

For HR tech vendors, it's crucial to meet clients where they are in their journey. Tailor your offerings to address the immediate needs of organizations, focusing on practical applications that solve specific pain points rather than just showcasing advanced features. Provide case studies and testimonials that demonstrate real-world outcomes to build trust and credibility. Additionally, offer resources on data governance and risk management to help clients navigate the complexities of AI adoption.

Recognize that the gap in AI readiness is often cultural rather than technical. Look for ways you can support, or offer partners that can help foster a culture of innovation, learning and experimentation with AI. Position your company as a long-term partner, ready to assist customers as they evolve and grow.

To HR leaders

Stop fixating on your AI roadmap and start concentrating on the real challenges your organization faces. Identify the specific pain points that need addressing — this is where you can develop strategies that AI can support. Remember, AI is merely a tool designed to enhance human-led innovation and transformation; the technology itself is not the innovation.

Focus on deploying AI solutions that align with your business goals, ensuring they genuinely address your organization's needs. Engage your employees in this process to gather insights and foster acceptance and even excitement about what can come next. By prioritizing real challenges over the allure of cutting-edge technology, you can create a more effective and meaningful approach to AI adoption.

