

PEOPLE & HR LIVE CONFERENCE RECAP

Designing an Employee Experience That Inspires, Recognizes, and Supports

BY JESSICA SWENSON | MAY 08, 2026

[People & HR](#) / [Live Conference Recap](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

Given the amount of change and disruption in today's workplace, the employee experience is really the change experience, says Renu Sharma, head of learning and skill development at [HP](#).

"Learning and change management are no longer a support function. They're really defining the employee experience," Sharma told moderator Rachael Myrow, senior editor at KQED, during a panel discussion at [From Day One's Silicon Valley conference](#).

Sharma advocated for using clarity, transparency, and skill-building to give employees the confidence they need to adapt and remain productive. HP also offers leadership development to support leaders helping their teams navigate and prepare for change.

Agile, human-centered leadership development systems are another key to building better employee environments, says Michel-Riyad Nabti, senior director of learning and development for [Autodesk](#). By using enterprise-wide data to personalize leadership training and inform workflow capabilities, Nabti's group positions people leaders to effectively guide teams through change.

"We're focused on building high performance, and also building capabilities for managers to be drivers of change and lead teams through change, because of the inevitability of continuous change," he said. "As we look at defining what those competencies look like, we are also examining, how do we continuously evolve [them] to reflect the needs of the organization and externalities that are having an impact on the company?"

The human side of transformation needs to be considered, says Matt Jackson, chief growth officer for [Unmind](#). Workplace transformations can amplify the existing life stressors that employees bring to work every day, he says, so investing heavily in technology but neglecting the psychological impact often leads to transformation failure.



Panelists spoke about "Designing an Employee Experience That Inspires, Recognizes, and Supports" at the Silicon Valley event

It's also important to recognize the emotional process that employees must manage while going through change, says Hari Date, principal consultant at [Workhuman](#). Rather than enforcing top-down mandates that require employees to "just deal with" a change, allow time for them to adjust. "Give them that time to process and just understand and be aware that you've already gone through that journey. They're just hearing it for the first time; give them that time and that grace to go through that," he said.

Panelists agreed that providing support to employees doesn't have to be complex. Citing a Gallup survey, Jackson said, "The biggest driver of engagement, from a manager's behavior, is having one meaningful conversation with a direct report each week."

Providing a safe space for learning also emerged as a common theme. By creating structured learning spaces and sharing internal success stories, says Sharma, HP helps employees build confidence through visibility and continuous learning, which helps scale adoption of new concepts like AI. It also helps connect team members who have similar challenges. "[Make] sure you're providing them a safe space and having that trust and psychological safety where they can come and learn."

According to Nabti, normalizing AI experimentation, reducing the stigma around using AI tools, and encouraging discussion of how AI shows up in daily work can also help foster a sense of psychological safety. "How do you open up that conversation and create an AI-native mindset so that your team feels fully invited into that conversation and has the opportunity to grow as individuals while they grow in terms of performance," he said.

Leaders acknowledge that AI adoption requires both cultural and behavioral shifts within an organization. Cynthia Hannah, VP of talent development and experience at [Okta](#), stresses that AI adoption is shaped by perception and can be uneven across organizational levels. She has found that leadership teams are more on the leading edge of AI use, but aren't necessarily sharing their experience with the organization. That has helped Okta to ask the right questions to find its footing with workforce AI proficiency.

"What does getting everyone proficient on AI look like, and how do we keep building the skills on that as we go forward?" Hannah asked. By starting with that core proficiency, you can better position the organization to integrate AI into meaningful workflows and create value.

A focus on adapting mindsets, skills, and expectations can help balance anxiety with healthy tension to promote AI adoption. Nabti and team are looking at how AI is fundamentally changing their teams' workflows while also exploring how it can augment human potential.

Hannah acknowledges AI skill gaps but sees great opportunity for talent and HR professionals. "If you're in the talent space, it's been really hard to take the recognition data, the performance data, the feedback that happens in a class, and actually have all those signals together. There's just a real drive to make all the systems talk together to have that insight."

Despite concerns that managers will be replaced by AI, many companies are actually using it to support managers with coaching, education, recognition insights, and workflow innovations.

Unmind centralizes training materials and best practices into a single proprietary AI coach to boost the effectiveness of newly promoted managers, says Jackson.

The use of AI-driven employee recognition data allows Workhuman clients to identify engagement gaps, take proactive retention actions, and recommend new hire mentors. By shifting your perspective on recognition analytics, Date asserts that you can pick up attrition signals and take early actions to prevent employee turnover.

Hannah suggests that thinking critically about how and why your organization is using AI can help you find new ways to add business value and engage teams. "When you start to talk about what's possible that wasn't possible before, that clicks into creativity. Now it's change you're leading versus change you're responding to, and you can engage your teams in that."

Organizational change and AI technologies aren't going anywhere, so leaders need to embrace transparency, clarity, and employee-centered strategies to

keep teams engaged and guide them into these new spaces. With a long-term view of AI-driven workplaces and lifestyles, Date said, "I think, for now, it's just figuring out how we coexist in this world that we're building."

Jessica Swenson is a freelance writer and proofreader based in the Midwest. Learn more about her at jmswensonllc.com.

(Photos by Josh Larson for From Day One)

ADVERTISEMENT



RESOURCES

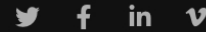
About
Press
Contribute
Become A Speaker
Join Our Team
Accessibility
Covid-19 Policies

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

Live 2026: Chicago Half-Day
Benefits Conference
Live 2026: Manhattan
June Virtual: Benefits & Total
Rewards
July Virtual: Brand Marketing &
Strategy
September Virtual: Benefits & Well-
Being

RECENT CONFERENCES

February: Washington, D.C.
February: Houston
January: Atlanta



From restructuring to AI disruption, HR leaders are keeping teams steady: supporting middle managers, and leading w...

<https://t.co/uil1r9gszq>

6 months ago