Tasks, Skills and Human in the Lead: Rewiring the Workforce for the AI Era

Cross-industry perspective gathered at the Draup HR Conclave, New York City, February 2026

Introduction

In February 2026, Draup convened HR leaders, workforce strategists, talent executives, and technology operators across industries to examine a central question:

How does AI fundamentally reshape enterprise value creation through work?

The conversation has moved beyond experimentation. AI is no longer a technology discussion. It is an operating model decision.

Across panels, one reality became clear: organizations are approaching AI at the role level — while value is being created (or destroyed) at the **task and workflow level**. Over-automation in the wrong areas, undefined productivity metrics, and misaligned systems are introducing friction rather than advantage. At the same time, HR is emerging not as a support function, but as a **planning and capability architecture** function — increasingly central to enterprise strategy.

Four structural shifts surfaced repeatedly:

1. **Work must be decomposed into tasks and rebuilt into AI-enabled workflows.**
2. **Talent acquisition must balance AI acceleration with human judgment as a trust anchor.**
3. **Workforce planning must shift from headcount forecasting to capability modeling.**
4. **Skills architecture must become continuous infrastructure, not a one-time exercise.**

These are not independent themes. They are interlocking components of a single transformation: moving from job-centric design to task-centric value creation.

This paper synthesizes those discussions into an executive framework. Its purpose is not to debate whether AI changes work. It is to clarify how leaders can deliberately redesign their enterprise around it — without sacrificing governance, trust, or long-term capability.

1. Work Redesign

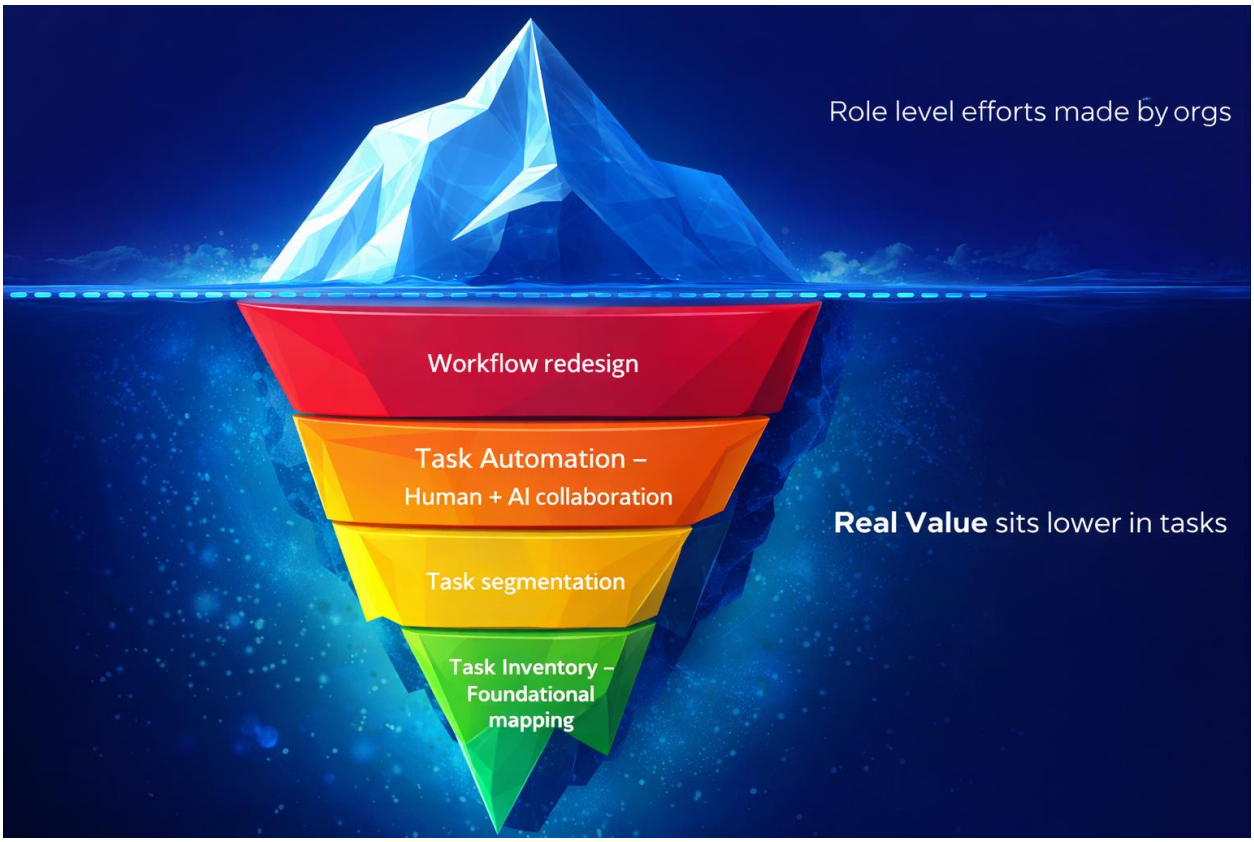
Work redesign surfaced as a key theme in the conference. The debate is no longer whether AI changes how work gets done. It is about breaking work into tasks, deciding what stays with humans and what moves to AI, and figuring out how to sequence that transition without

breaking what already works. Work design was further discussed over task level decomposition, productivity and governance, all of which are the governing entities of work design.

Task-Level Decomposition: Where the Value Actually Lies

AI value doesn't materialize at the role level. It shows when work is decomposed into tasks and assembled into workflows, because any job is a sum of the tasks it entails. The real leverage sits lower: at the intersection of individual tasks and the workflows that connect them across teams and systems. This was one of the more consistent threads across the conference. Speakers returned repeatedly to the idea that "AI automates tasks, not jobs".

The Autor-Levy-Murnane (ALM) task framework from labor economics provides a useful analytical foundation. Every role is a portfolio of activities distributed across cognitive-routine, cognitive-non-routine, physical-routine, and physical-non-routine dimensions. With LLMs and agentic AI increasingly capable of handling complex cognitive-routine work, and with agentic systems beginning to operate across interconnected tasks rather than isolated activities, the decomposition must occur at the task level. The conference echoed this directly. Speakers described "breaking work into tasks" and segmenting them into categories before deciding what belongs to AI and what stays with humans.



Administrative Friction: The Fastest Starting Point

Speakers described administrative friction as a drag on the systems. It's where time gets consumed: compliance workflows, multi-system data entry, scheduling chains, reporting loops. These workflows are high-volume, and routine, making them well-suited for LLM-augmented automation.

Removing this burden frees up capacity for the judgment-heavy work that matters, without introducing the risk that comes with automating decisions. **For Instance**, in a hospital, scheduling a patient procedure often requires verifying insurance eligibility, checking clinician availability, entering data into multiple systems, generating confirmation documents, and sending reminders. An agentic system can coordinate these steps end-to-end pulling required data, updating systems, generating communications, and flagging exceptions, while human administrative staff can step in only when something falls outside standard rules. As a result, administrative automation becomes a low-regret, high-signal entry point for AI-enabled operating model redesign, building technical validation, process confidence, and changing readiness at scale.

Enterprise Flow, Not Individual Productivity

There's a tendency to measure AI's impact through individual productivity: Output per person/tasks completed by a person. A **recurring theme throughout the conference** was the distinction between optimizing individual productivity and driving enterprise-wide productivity. The call was to "drive more value across rather than individual productivity," signaling that AI's real promise lies not in making single employees faster, but in redesigning how work moves through an organization.

This perspective extended into operational design discussions, where AI transformation was framed as rethinking how workflows between systems, people, and AI. Rather than applying AI in isolation, the focus is on embedding it at each step of the workflow. When AI is woven into the fabric of how an enterprise operates, it creates compounding gains across teams and functions that naturally elevate individual productivity as a byproduct

Governance as a Design Principle

Across the conference, a consistent theme emerged: AI governance should not be treated as a compliance checkbox, but as a foundational design principle embedded into how enterprises build and operate. The sentiment that "just because we can doesn't mean we should" captured the broader caution around deploying AI. Speakers emphasized the need for controlled systems,

and human in the loop frameworks, to ensure AI scales responsibly. Governance was positioned as inseparable from architecture.

This was reinforced by references to emerging regulatory frameworks such as the **EU AI Act, NIST AI Risk Management Framework, and ISO 42001**, signaling that governance is no longer optional and is becoming a structural requirement. Enterprise safeguards like LLM hardening, data sovereignty, zero trust architecture, and ethical sourcing transparency were outlined as essential components of responsible AI implementation. Governance should be treated as a design principle rather than a regulatory burden, which in turn paves the foundation that allows AI to scale with trust, resilience, and long-term strategic value baked in from the start.

2. Talent Acquisition

Talent acquisition emerged as one of the most actively debated topics at the conference. AI is clearly accelerating how organizations screen and hire, but at the same time recruiters bring judgment, observation, and contextual understanding that AI simply cannot replicate. The conversation also pushed TA beyond its traditional role, positioning it as a strategic function tied to long term workforce planning rather than just a delivery mechanism

Human-in-the-Loop as a Competitive Differentiator

Trust is becoming a measurable factor in hiring outcomes, and that trust is tied directly to the perception that a person not an algorithm evaluated their candidacy. Speakers were explicit that "AI cannot replace the judgment of a recruiter" and that the human final step is non-negotiable. AI driven video interviews, piloted over the past two years, are being pulled back across industries. Not because the technology failed, but because the candidate experience suffered in ways that damaged employer brand.

The validation layer requires human, where feedback, judgement, and final assessment should rely on Humans whereas framing JDs, posting, tracking applicants can be augmented by AI, echoed all speakers.

Candidate AI Usage Is Reshaping Screening

Speakers openly voiced concern that "candidates are cracking interviews with AI and ChatGPT," and that the signals recruiters once relied on, writing quality, answers, case studies, are

becoming less diagnostic. Skills based assessments, live problem-solving exercises, and structured behavioral interviews designed to get past the rehearsed layer are gaining traction.

The conference framed this as a design challenge: authenticity validation needs to become a part of the overall hiring architecture. AI resume screening must be supported by final checks by the recruiter to ensure less automation in components which require more human judgement. This also ensures targeted hiring for the job roles.

From Speed to Quality-of-Decision Metrics

TA has optimized speed for a decade: time-to-fill, time-to-offer, requisition aging. These metrics shaped operating models, incentive structures, and technology investments. These metrics are becoming increasingly insufficient as speed in hiring means little if the decision quality is poor, and with AI now shaping both sides of the process, traditional metrics are losing their ability to tell us whether we actually made the right call. This came through clearly at the conference. Speakers pushed back on the reflex to measure activity. The shift is toward quality of hire, skill alignment, and long-term fit, which again links back to bringing Human layer as a validation or judgement layer, the importance of which is supreme in the entire hiring cycle.

Strategic vs. Tactical Segmentation

The distinction between strategic and tactical recruiting was a clear message when it comes to TA in today's world, the operating model split is now becoming structural rather than situational:

Segment	Operating Model	AI Role	Human Role
High-volume / Tactical	Speed-optimized, process-driven	Screening, scheduling, matching	QA, offer decision
Specialized / Mid-tier	Balanced AI-recruiter model	Sourcing, market intelligence	Assessment, engagement
Strategic / Executive	Relationship-led, long-horizon	Market mapping, comp data	Full lifecycle advisory

AI Readiness and the Recruiter Capability Gap

Most TA teams already have AI powered sourcing, screening, and analytics available to them. The problem lies in the fact of "how are these tools used". This came up at the conference

specially for speakers in healthcare sector. AI screening tends to be same across job roles, levels and functions, but any recruiter who has been a part of the hiring cycle knows that the real judgment calls happen between those categories. AI integration within TA still sits at a lower percentage, with real resistance on the ground. That is not a technology gap. It is a capability gap.

Closing this gap is a development investment, not a procurement decision. It means building AI literacy within TA, running structured experiments (test and learn), and assessing where the function's capability sits today versus where it needs to be.

3. Strategic Workforce Planning

From Headcount to Capability Modeling

Traditional workforce planning operates at the job-category level. That altitude misses where AI's impact sits, below the surface, at the task and skill level. A role that looks stable on the org chart may have had a third of its task automated in the past year. A function that appears overstaffed may be under-skilled for the work that remains once the routine is taken away. Current job categories/roles are becoming unreliable as planning units due to every increasing number of changes.

Capability modeling addresses this by treating skills and task portfolios, not headcount, as planning variables. The conference framed skills as "the balance sheet," repositioning them from an HR exercise to an enterprise asset. This requires a robust data infrastructure. Speakers described building this through proof of concepts, mapping skills to job profiles, and pushing for better data to transparency skills. But the infrastructure challenge goes beyond technology. External hiring is slowing in highly automated areas, meaning the capability gaps that remain must be filled through internal development, redeployment, or fundamentally different sourcing strategies, which points towards robust capability development and not a single pointed focus towards headcount.

Reading the Early Signals

The macro signs of an AI-driven workforce shift are already visible, and the conference gave shape to what many were intuitively sensing. Job descriptions are becoming denser as routine tasks are automated, and the remaining work becomes more complex. Speakers openly questioned whether rising skills per JD is a positive evolution or a warning sign, The answer

seemed to depend on intent, are roles being thoughtfully redesigned, or is additional responsibility simply being layered onto fewer people?

Individual contributor ratios are increasing as coordination, and some of the entry level tasks are absorbed by AI and workflow automation. At the same time, hiring is slowing in highly automatable areas while accelerating in roles that require judgment, and creativity. These Macro trends can be used as directional indicators and can be leveraged to make informed workforce strategies.

Experimentation as a Planning Instrument

There's a principal which operates at all levels whenever new technology comes in, no experiment, no readiness. The conference made this explicit, with speakers stating plainly that "no experiment means no future existence." Planning from current-state data and historical trends alone is not enough, they should be supported by Pilot programs that test AI-augmented roles in one unit, workforce models for newly automated functions, running skills-based internal mobility experiments to name a few to generate the signal that traditional forecasting cannot. They are a form of prediction in themselves.

This reframes the planning function, enabled by a portfolio of structured experiments that generates the information needed to make better decisions under uncertainty.

Long-Term Pipelines Over Reactive Hiring

Reactive hiring is expensive, slow, and increasingly ineffective for the capabilities that matter most. The skills needed in three to five years, AI orchestration, human AI workflow design, advanced analytics, cross domain integration, are not sitting in today's applicant pools. They need to be built. The conference grounded this in a clear strategic frame: organizations must actively create the future of talent ready rather than react to it. Workforce planning was positioned as foundational, not supplementary, and speakers were direct that without investment in long term pipelines the planning function is just forecasting decline.

University partnerships, apprenticeship programs, ecosystem investments, early-career pipeline development, these are moving from peripheral HR activities to core SWP strategies. The shift is from treating pipeline just a TA exercise to treating it as a planning function.

4. Reskilling and Development

Skills Architecture as Continuous Infrastructure

A clear shift at the conference was the way skills architecture is being repositioned. It is no longer viewed as a one-time project with a defined end state, but as ongoing infrastructure that supports workforce planning.

Several speakers acknowledged a common pattern: an organization completes comprehensive skills mapping exercise, validates taxonomy, and integrates it into planning tools. But as roles evolve, AI reshapes task composition, and new technologies enter workflows, the underlying skills data quickly falls out of alignment with actual work. The model remains static while the work changes dynamically.

The discussion emphasized that durable skills architecture requires continuous calibration. That means validating skills data against real task execution, refreshing taxonomies as market and technology conditions shift, and establishing governance mechanisms to manage updates and ownership. Without these feedback loops, the gap between what the system records and what the workforce can do widens over time.

Defining What Counts as a Skill

An extension of the skills architecture discussion was a more basic but critical question: what qualifies as a skill. Much of the fragmentation in skills-based strategies stems from ambiguity at this foundational layer. When definitions vary, alignment across HR, L&D, and business becomes difficult.

These distinctions are structural. Whether something is classified as a skill, a competency, a tool proficiency, or part of a broader capability framework directly affects how roles are profiled, how gaps are measured, and how learning investments are allocated. Once embedded into systems and planning models, these definitions shape downstream decisions in durable ways.

Internal Validation as Credibility Anchor

Skills architecture does need to reflect a broader alignment with the external market; however it needs to be more aligned to a particular company, and the industry they are operating in.

Skills models built purely from external benchmarks or vendor taxonomies describe the market's view of a role, not the organization's core nature of work. They tend to lose credibility quickly with the managers and employees who are supposed to use them. Speakers from healthcare and retail emphasized the fact that for a skills model to drive planning, hiring, and development decisions, it needs to be anchored in internal validation.

Future Readiness: The Capability Baseline Is Shifting

Skills per job description are increasing. As routine cognitive work gets automated, what remains is harder: judgment under complicated situation, validations, cross-functional coordination, complex communication, ethical reasoning. These are not new additions to the competency list. They're becoming baseline expectations rather than differentiators.

Three capabilities emerge as foundational:

1. Critical Thinking — Specifically, the ability to interrogate assumptions, evaluate evidence quality, and resist the pull of AI-generated plausibility. Education's role here is to teach people to challenge AI, not just use it.
2. Learning Agility — The capacity to learn, unlearn, and relearn as conditions shift.
3. AI Output Review — The ability to assess and validate when AI confidence aligns with actual accuracy, identify embedded assumptions, and override recommendations when human judgment says otherwise.

These capabilities need development across teams, both tech and tech adjacent and across sectors.

Conclusion

Across every panel, one idea surfaced repeatedly:

AI is not a tool layered onto work — it is a force that reshapes how work is structured, how tasks flow, how talent is deployed, and how planning connects to development.

What makes this moment different from prior waves of automation is not just technological capability. It is structural impact.

AI is now embedded in day-to-day knowledge work, workflow management, and cross-team coordination. That means the unit of redesign is no longer the role — it is the task. And when tasks are reorganized into AI-enabled workflows, enterprise economics shift. Productivity changes. Skill requirements change. Governance models change.

At the same time, the conference made something equally clear: full automation is neither the goal nor the advantage.

Trust, accountability, and judgment remain strategic assets. In hiring, governance, and decision-making, the human layer is not a backup plan. It is a deliberate design choice.

The organizations that will outperform in the AI era will not be those that automate the fastest. They will be those that redesign work most deliberately — embedding AI into workflows while preserving human oversight where it strengthens trust and long-term value.

This shift carries three executive implications:

1. **Value sits below the role level.**
   Leaders must map and redesign work at the task level to unlock durable gains.

2. **Capability is the new balance sheet.**
   Workforce planning must move from headcount forecasting to capability modeling and long-term skill development.

3. **Governance must be built into architecture.**
   AI risk management, regulatory alignment, and human validation must be structural — not reactive.

AI transformation is not a technology upgrade. It is an operating model redesign.

Boards and executive teams now face a defining choice: treat AI as incremental productivity enhancement or treat it as a structural redesign of how the enterprise creates value.

The transition from tasks to talent is not incremental. It is architectural. And architectural decisions compound.

Executive Imperatives: 2026–2028

1. **Mandate Work Redesign**
   Require priority functions to map work at the task level and rebuild workflows with AI embedded by design — not layered on top.

2. **Shift Workforce Planning to Capability Modeling**
   Treat skills and task portfolios as strategic assets. Move beyond headcount forecasts to quantified capability gaps and build plans.

3. **Redefine Enterprise Productivity Metrics**
   Measure workflow velocity, decision quality, and cross-functional impact — not just individual output.

4. **Embed Governance into AI Architecture**
   Align AI systems with regulatory frameworks and risk controls from the design stage, with clear human accountability points.

5. **Build Long-Term AI-Native Talent Pipelines**
   Invest in AI orchestration, validation, and human–AI workflow design capabilities internally rather than relying solely on external hiring.