

NEW RESEARCH WARNS COMPANIES MAY BE “BORROWING FROM TOMORROW” AS THEY REDESIGN WORK

As companies race to adopt AI and redesign work, new research identifies a growing risk: organizations may be transforming faster than they can see what those changes are doing to talent, capability, and future value.

NEW YORK, September 30, 2026 — As companies race to adopt AI, redesign jobs, flatten organizations, and rethink how work gets done, new research from the Coqual Global Lab, part of the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI) warns that gains made today could come at the expense of the human capabilities businesses will need tomorrow.

Released today, *Borrowing from Tomorrow: How to Fight the Hype and Design the Future of Work on Purpose* asks a fundamental question: Are companies designing the organizations they want to become—or allowing that future to emerge by default?

The research reveals significant gaps in leaders’ field of view. Only 2 in 5 executives surveyed report an expert understanding of their organization’s strategic priorities for the coming year, while only 35% strongly understand their organizations’ workforce priorities and 30% strongly understand their customer base.

At the same time, critical perspectives are often missing from decisions shaping the future of work. Nearly half (49%) of decision-makers surveyed say a broad range of human perspectives, experiences, and needs are never, rarely, or only sometimes intentionally considered in AI governance. The same is true for 47% in workflow redesign and 44% in workforce restructuring.

“Organizations are making thousands of choices right now about what to automate, which roles to redesign, what people should continue to do, and what capabilities they will need,” said Emily Gawlak, lead researcher and Executive Director of CTI’s Global Lab. “Those choices aren’t just changing how work gets done. Together, they’re building the organization that comes next. Leaders have an opportunity to make sure they’re building it on purpose.”

Borrowing from Tomorrow introduces the Human Talent Deficit: the gap between the human capabilities and contributions an organization will need to create future value and what its operating model enables people to develop, sustain, and contribute.

AI can make that risk harder to see and easier to scale. An entry-level task eliminated for efficiency may also have been where someone developed judgment. A management layer removed for speed may have carried relationships and institutional knowledge. A decision automated for consistency may also have been where people learned to recognize exceptions.

As the report puts it: “An entry-level task may be inefficient. It may also be how expertise develops.”

The future of work is also a future of access. As organizations redesign jobs and workflows, they are reshaping who gets to learn, contribute, advance, and lead—and the experiences through which people build expertise, gain visibility, form critical relationships, and prepare for leadership.

The question is not whether organizations should change. It is whether leaders understand what today’s ways of working produce before replacing them and whether they are deliberately creating what people and businesses will need next.

Rather than prescribing a single vision for the future workplace, *Borrowing from Tomorrow* introduces four Design

Bridges to help leaders make better decisions under uncertainty:

1. **Strategic Coherence** — Get clear about the value the organization is trying to create and over what time horizon.
2. **Distributed Accountability** — Keep authority and accountability connected as decisions spread across functions, vendors, leaders, and technology.
3. **Organizational Depth Perception** — Bring operational expertise and human experience into the same consequential decisions.
4. **Applied Insight** — Learn from what the organization builds while there is still time to adjust.

Together, the Design Bridges help organizations move from transformation by default toward Sustainable Transformation: creating value today while preserving and renewing the conditions required to keep creating value tomorrow.

The release of *Borrowing from Tomorrow* also marks Coqual's return to its founding name, the **Center for Talent Innovation**.

For more than two decades, CTI has studied the dynamics organizations often miss about talent: how opportunity moves, how systems shape careers, how people experience work differently, and what allows organizations to make better use of the talent they have. Today, those questions sit inside some of the biggest decisions companies are making about AI, work design, skills, performance, development, and advancement.

"As companies change how work gets done, they are also changing how people learn, perform, lead, and advance," said Jennie Glazer, CEO of the Center for Talent Innovation. "Our role is to help leaders see what those changes are setting in motion, especially what they may be missing. We bring research, employee experience, and the perspective of leaders across industries together so companies can make better choices while those choices are still theirs to make. That is talent innovation."

CTI brings business, talent, and people leaders together through original research, trusted peer communities, and practical guidance to help organizations make better choices for their people and their business.

The future of work cannot be predicted. But it can be designed on purpose.

METHODOLOGY: *Borrowing from Tomorrow* draws on a survey of 173 organizational decision-makers, 44 semi-structured interviews with organizational leaders, practitioners, consultants, and subject-matter experts, executive convenings and a design lab, multidisciplinary scholarship, and more than two decades of CTI research into talent, leadership, workplace culture, relationships, and organizational systems.

About the Organization: The Center for Talent Innovation (CTI), formerly Coqual, is an independent nonprofit research organization and community of practice. As companies change how work gets done, CTI helps them change how people learn, perform, and move up. CTI combines original research, employee insight, trusted peer communities, and practical guidance to help leaders make better choices for their people and their business. For more information, visit <https://www.talentinnovation.org>

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