

Why Hiring Numbers Hide the Real Workforce Story

HR Executive | Jill Barth | August 13, 2026



July's jobs report showed that payrolls fell even as layoff announcements hit a two-year low and hiring plans jumped.

For Peter Miscovich, global future of work leader at JLL, the numbers don't offer a full explanation. "Workforce transformation is becoming more nuanced, and it cannot be fully captured by traditional headcount metrics in jobs reports."

Miscovich says multiple shifts are happening inside companies at once, pointing to a pattern JLL's *Future of Work* research has been tracking in its global survey of more than 2,200 executives, many of them working in commercial real estate. "Some roles may be reduced or eliminated while other roles will expand and then entirely new roles are also being created, often within the very same organization, and all at the same time," he told *HR Executive*.

New functions for roles

Miscovich says role shifting is happening more and more among the companies investing most heavily in AI. Rather than treating the tech mainly as a cost-cutting tool, AI-intensive organizations use it as a lever for growth, innovation and new workforce opportunities.

JLL's research found that 15% of organizations have reached the "optimizing" phase of AI adoption in their real estate operations, and those firms are using AI to improve decision-making and support business expansion.

Miscovich says these firms tend to show strong cross-functional collaboration and operational resilience. They then redirect AI-driven productivity gains toward growth initiatives.

There's a talent shortage

Slower hiring is also due to a shortage of people who can do the work. "For the first time in the 15-year history of the *Future of Work* research, talent constraints surpassed financial constraints as the leading barrier to transformation," Miscovich says. Organizations are struggling to find people with AI expertise, analytical problem-solving ability and the judgment to manage AI-driven change.

That shortage is compounded by fast-changing job categories. "The most significant change is not simply the automation of existing jobs, but the redesign of work itself," Miscovich says. AI is letting employees combine tasks once split across other specialists. These expanded roles often don't map onto conventional occupational classifications, which makes them difficult to track through standard workforce data.

JLL's research groups the resulting roles into three categories:

- **System Thinkers:** orchestrate ecosystems rather than performing tasks alone
- **System Builders:** create and refine human-AI workflows across functions
- **System Operators:** manage AI systems through monitoring, quality control and intervention

What HR leaders should watch instead

Miscovich recommends HR leaders track different metrics than the ones that dominate monthly jobs coverage.

One is the restructuring of management layers, as AI absorbs routine coordination and analysis and pushes companies toward smaller, cross-functional teams.

He also points out a rising need for in-person collaboration, since organizations deploying AI successfully often require more face-to-face engagement to build trust and solve complex problems.

A third is simply the pace of skills development. Because expanded, blended roles resist standard job classifications, Miscovich says, HR leaders should monitor changes in skills, responsibilities and workflows rather than titles or historical headcount.

Job additions and eliminations tracked in isolation tell an incomplete story, according to Miscovich. He says workforce strength should be measured by how effectively an organization develops its long-term talent strategy and meets the upskilling demands of AI adoption.