



The State of Workplace Culture
2025 Trends and a
Look Ahead at 2026





Over the past 12 months, companies have navigated an extraordinary convergence of change:

- The rapid adoption of AI has redefined how people work, raising both optimism about productivity and innovation, and anxiety about its impact on the workforce and how to successfully adopt AI-powered solutions.
- Economic uncertainty brought on by tariffs, a deceleration in global growth and investment, and elevated geopolitical risk have forced companies to make difficult tradeoffs while still trying to invest in their people.
- A new presidential administration in the United States pursued a legal and political strategy that caused companies to reexamine mainstream workplace initiatives around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Against this backdrop, talent and culture leaders have faced a simple but profound question: **What kind of culture will help us thrive in an era of change and uncertainty?**

With that, 2025 was a year of recalibration: adapting to new realities, rethinking programs, crafting new narratives and communication strategies, and reimagining the role culture can play in fueling business and employee performance. To understand how companies approached this shift in 2025 and what the year ahead holds for talent leaders, we analyzed:

- Results of Paradigm's updated talent and culture benchmarking survey administered in October 2025, representing more than 200 companies across industries.
- Aggregated data, both quantitative and qualitative, representing almost 200 organizations from Paradigm's AI-powered talent intelligence platform.
- Insights from hundreds of organizations who partnered with Paradigm's experts in 2025 to strengthen their talent and culture strategy and programs.

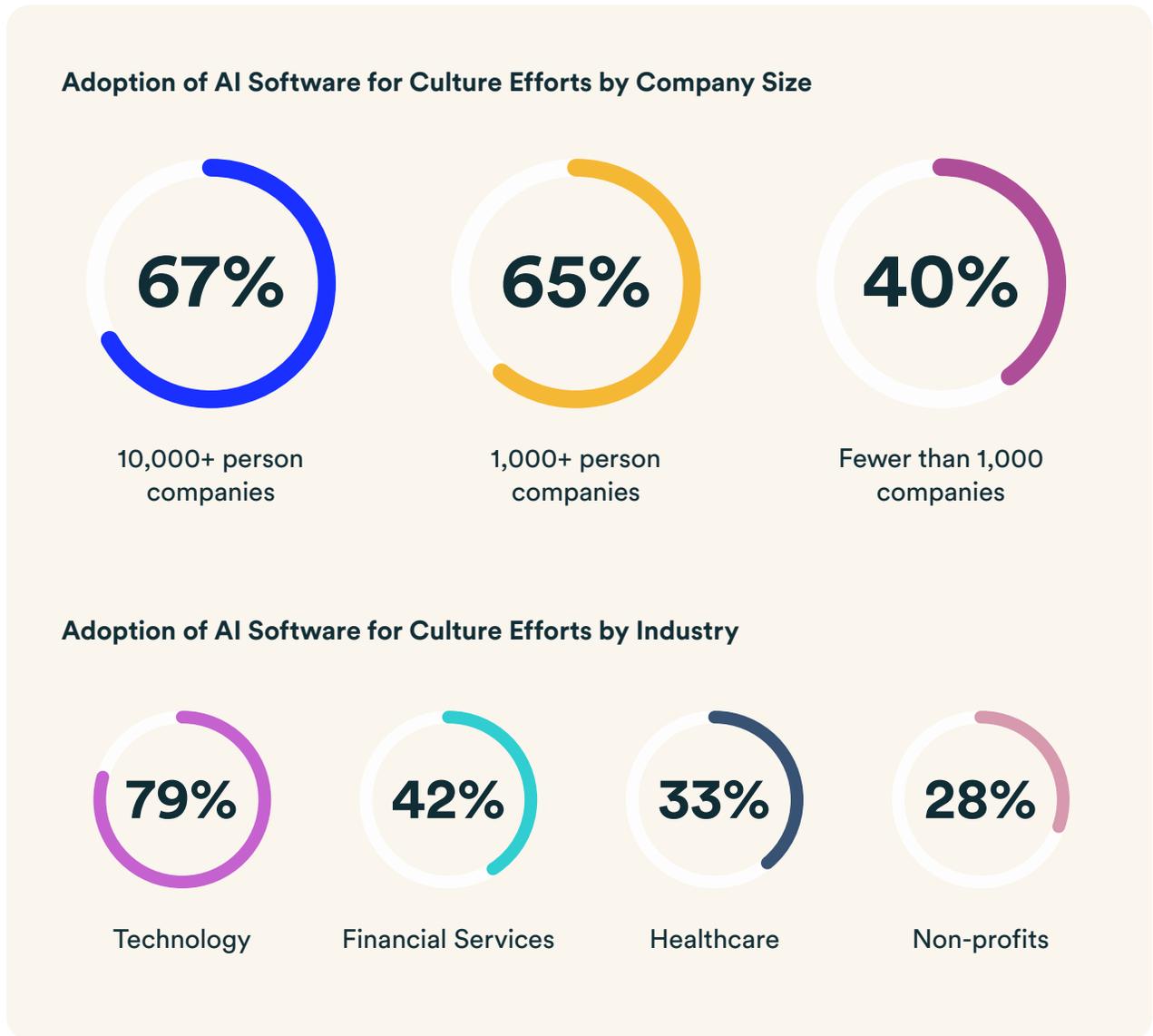
From this vantage point, we identified three defining trends that will shape workplace culture in 2026 and beyond: the (uneven) rise of AI, new pressures on talent leaders to adapt and sustain culture efforts, and a focus on embedding best practices that build and sustain resilient, high-performing cultures to ensure a future-ready workforce.



The (Uneven) Rise of AI in Culture Efforts

In 2025, AI crossed the chasm and is now impacting almost every organization in a variety of ways, from shifting organizational charts and team structure to shaping how functions across the enterprise do their work to influencing employees' own individual workflows.

When we looked specifically at the [intersection of AI and workplace culture](#), we found that **half of the companies in our benchmark (50%) are already using AI at an organizational level to support culture and/or talent programs**. However, some are adopting AI-powered culture tools at a much higher rate than others — specifically, we see far more adoption in enterprise companies, as well as in the technology sector:





Adoption of AI Software by Use Case

When we dive deeper into how AI tools are being used, the most popular use cases for HR and talent leaders are:



We also explored how companies are approaching AI at the individual level: how are they empowering employees' adoption of AI in their specific roles? Here, training is playing an essential role. **The vast majority of companies, 82%, are already upskilling or plan to upskill employees on AI.** Most, 63%, are centralizing that training as part of their culture and talent efforts instead of leaving it to teams or individuals. And interestingly, only 21% of companies are using AI for individual coaching.

What does this all mean for talent leaders in 2026? In short, the focus should shift from adoption to maximization. It's critical for leaders to continue investing in upskilling their workforce around the most monumental technology shift of this generation. And while the most popular current application of AI for culture efforts — drafting communications — is valuable, the huge gap between that and more strategic use cases is an untapped opportunity for organizations.



AI's promise is not just efficiency — it's also insight. When applied thoughtfully, it can strengthen culture and performance by surfacing patterns in employee sentiment, highlighting gaps in decision-making, and guiding talent leaders toward more effective practices. Forward-thinking leaders recognize this enormous untapped potential: their biggest question isn't whether to use AI, it's what specific tooling will be most impactful for their specific organization.

Large enterprises are increasingly building AI tooling internally, but 2026 will bring a sharper focus on what to build versus what to buy. In general, organizations should **build when needs are unique**, when specific subject matter expertise is not required, and when solutions need to be structured in a highly tailored way to deliver on strategic needs. Building also makes sense when the theme being addressed is a top organizational priority and will therefore receive the attention, time, and expertise of the limited team of people dedicated to building internal AI tools.

By contrast, organizations should **buy** when working with an external vendor provides benchmarking or shared insights that can't be gained internally, when domain expertise is important, and/or when the theme being addressed is important, but may not get the amount of internal resourcing or prioritization it deserves.

Getting this balance right will be crucial in 2026. Companies that build selectively and buy strategically will not only move faster but also gain access to richer, more contextualized data that can strengthen rather than undermine culture.

“ Our biggest 2026 priorities are adapting [culture] work to be ready for the future and identifying ways AI can help us be more inclusive and live up to our values. ”

Talent Leader



New Pressures on Leaders to Adapt and Sustain Culture Efforts

In addition to AI, the biggest shift talent leaders had to navigate in 2025 was the impact of external pressures on their programs. After years of focus on building representative and inclusive organizations, 2025 forced many organizations into reactive mode — responding to an anti-“DEI” climate that tested the resilience of organizational strategies and the resolve of management teams.

While 93% of companies say that leaders are equally or more committed to building an inclusive culture as before and 86% say the same about building a diverse workforce, that commitment was difficult to translate to action in 2025. More specifically, talent leaders had to find new ways to sustain culture and inclusion efforts in a macroeconomic environment where themes like culture, employee experience, and wellbeing dropped off many C-Suite executives’ priority lists, while adapting to the DEI-antagonism of the new presidential administration in the U.S.

One of the biggest factors chilling these efforts was confusion around which programs and initiatives would be considered legally risky in the new landscape. In our October 2025 benchmarking study, 85% of talent leaders said new or updated government guidelines impacted their culture and inclusion efforts, and 50% said external activists influenced their efforts.

Among U.S.-based companies, one of the biggest shifts we’ve seen is a change in focus from external, high-visibility efforts to internal programs and initiatives designed to make organizations more inclusive and fair for existing candidates and employees. For example, in 2025:

 **44%**
of companies stopped setting goals related to increasing supplier diversity.

 **42%**
of companies stopped setting goals related to increasing representation of specific demographic groups in their company.

 **20%**
stopped internship programs focused on reaching underrepresented talent

“ We typically encourage our team members to not bring politics into the workplace, but many of the challenges facing our team members today are inherently political. How do you celebrate Pride month without politics creeping in? How do you celebrate racial diversity without calling out systemic injustice? This has gotten more difficult lately. **”**
U.S.-based Talent Leader



Instead, leaders are investing in efforts focused on creating a more fair, inclusive culture for their current employees:



Because many of these changes are driven by the U.S.-specific legal and political climate, we also explored differences in how other parts of the world are adapting their strategies.

While some of the nuances may differ, and the landscape is more complex for global organizations, the 2026 priorities for culture and talent leaders around the world are similar. Leaders told us their most common anticipated challenges are managing the impact of AI on the workforce bias, sustaining employee morale, rebuilding trust between the organization and its workforce, and upskilling people managers.

As leaders navigate these challenges, one factor will separate the organizations that merely adapt from those that thrive: fostering a growth mindset throughout the organization.

In a world where technology and expectations are evolving faster than ever, employees' ability to learn, experiment, and adapt is becoming just as critical as their existing expertise. AI and other emerging technologies will continue to reshape how people work, but they can also [accelerate growth for those ready to embrace change](#). When organizations build cultures that reward learning and progress, not just perfection, they equip their people to meet the future of work with confidence.



What Factors Influence Culture and Talent Leaders Most?

We asked leaders about the factors that influenced their culture and inclusion programs most in 2025, and to what extent. Here’s what they said:

To what extent do the following factors impact your culture and inclusion efforts:	Not at All	Somewhat	Very Much
Executive input	10%	26%	64%
Employee feedback	6%	34%	60%
Changes in your business	23%	47%	29%
New or updated government guidelines	15%	63%	22%
The economy	30%	51%	19%
What other companies are doing	27%	58%	15%
Signals from political leaders	33%	56%	11%
External activists	49%	42%	8%



Embedding Culture Best Practices Throughout the Organization

While external pressures raised new considerations in 2025, the factor that has the most impact on organizational culture strategy is the unique needs of the company and the input of their key internal audiences. When we asked talent leaders what influences their culture efforts most, they gave three clear answers: employee feedback (94%), executive input (90%), and changes in their business (76%).

With that in mind, it's no surprise that the most widespread culture programs in 2025 focused on **employee engagement, effective communication, and leader enablement**. The most common initiatives include employee surveys, HR benefits that meet a wide range of employees' needs, and analyzing and acting upon feedback about the employee experience. These practices are not only meeting the needs of the moment, they're also central to building high-performing cultures. By focusing on communication, connection, and accountability, companies are strengthening the foundations that drive innovation, retention, and productivity.

“ 2026 is about embedding [best practices] into the employee lifecycle, manager enablement, and helping leaders see culture isn't just community and event, but systems and processes. ”

Talent Leader

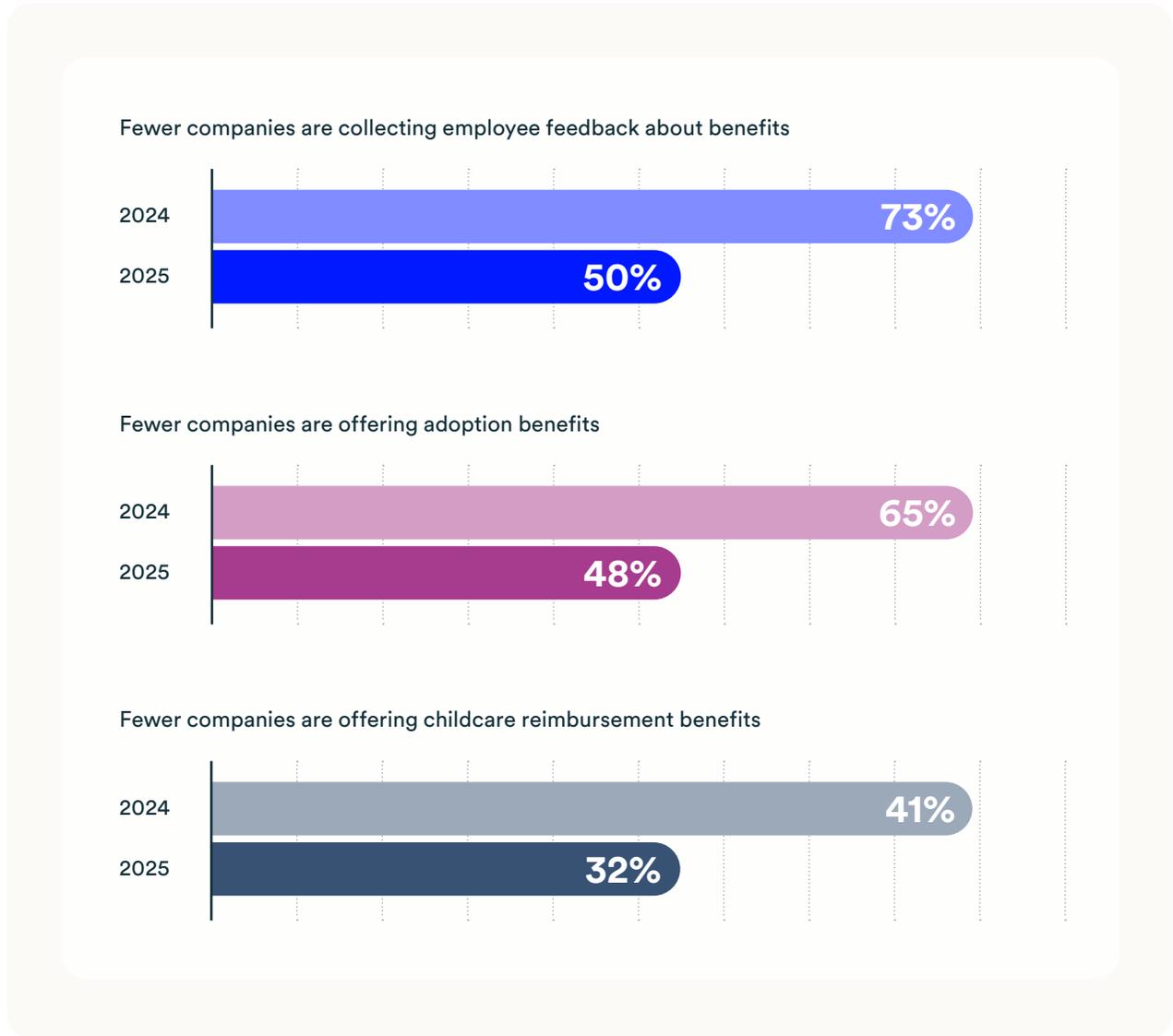
Leaders are also working to make these culture-strengthening efforts more resilient, **with 92% of organizations saying their efforts in 2025 are equally or more embedded than they were just a year ago.**

At the same time, many companies are still failing to fully leverage the data they have and the technology solutions available to effectively guide their strategy. While some companies are highly advanced, integrating analytics into every part of their people and culture strategies, many others have adopted very few or no structured efforts in this area. Even the most advanced companies often look at their data in silos: attrition data is one type of analysis, engagement data is another, performance data another, and maturity of HR policies yet another. And only 17% are using AI-powered software to benchmark their efforts.

Looking at these data together enables leaders to more effectively understand current trends, identify what's working, allocate resources strategically, and communicate progress with credibility — all essential in today's climate of heightened scrutiny and constrained budgets.



Taking a comprehensive view of data also reveals emerging risks and areas where leaders' investments aren't matching what employees value most. **Our data show one area that poses a considerable challenge for talent leaders in 2026: employee benefits.** Across nearly every benefit-related measure, we saw declines in organizational investment and focus from 2024 to 2025:



These decreases likely reflect cost containment efforts, but they also underscore the tension leaders face between short-term constraints and long-term culture health. Benefits play a critical role in helping employees feel supported and valued, and scaling them back risks undermining some of the engagement gains companies have worked to build.



Looking Ahead

The data make one thing clear: while external forces shape the environment, the greatest levers for progress still lie within organizations. Leaders and employees together have shown that when culture is intentional — when it's built through communication, connection, and accountability — performance follows.

As we look ahead to 2026, the challenge and the opportunity are the same: to keep building on that foundation. The future of work will demand more from leaders than operational excellence, it will demand cultural excellence. As AI reshapes roles, economic pressures persist, and expectations evolve, culture will determine whether organizations simply adapt or truly thrive. In the face of constant transformation, culture is what enables organizations to adapt with speed and purpose, aligning people around shared goals, sustaining performance, and fueling innovation through uncertainty.

The most successful organizations will be those that treat culture not as a set of programs, but as a living system: one that evolves as quickly as the world around it. They'll listen deeply to employees, empower leaders to act boldly, and use data to guide choices that drive both belonging and results.

At Paradigm, we believe that building a **culture for everyone** is more than a goal; it's a leadership imperative. The companies that invest in it today won't just be ready for the future of work — they'll define it.



Insights

Veterans aren't moving through your hiring process at the same rate as non veterans.

Engineers are reporting a less positive experience than other groups.

[Chat with AI Assistant](#)

Culture for Everyone: Strengths & Gaps

● Your score ● Blueprint Average



Powered by AI

This benchmarking dataset is just the beginning. To understand how your company compares — and to access additional insights shaped by our work with more than 2,000 companies — check out Paradigm's [Culture Intelligence Platform](#). It can show you exactly how your organization stacks these efforts — and many others — by company size and industry. Alongside those benchmarks and real-time trends, the AI-powered platform helps you gain insight, take action, and enable people.

If you're ready to build a culture for everyone, [contact Paradigm today.](#)

