

Talent

**Building future-ready
workforces for a changing
business landscape**



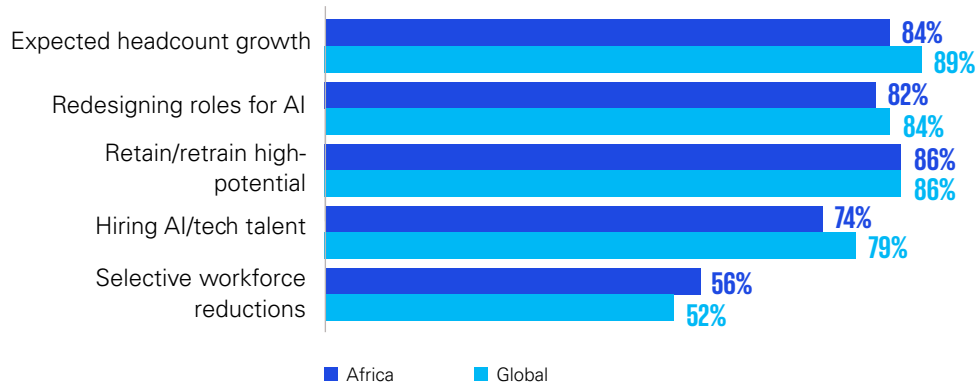
Talent

The talent dividend: turning AI ambition into workforce advantage

Africa vs Global | Workforce confidence, capability and growth

African CEOs are entering a new phase of workforce transformation. The question is no longer whether artificial intelligence will change work, but whether organisations can redesign roles, build critical skills and equip leaders quickly enough to translate investment into productivity and sustainable growth. The survey reveals a clear tension: ambition remains high, but confidence in the pace of execution trails global peers.

While 86 percent of African CEOs are confident or cautiously optimistic about keeping pace with AI, compared with 95 percent globally, just 14 percent believe they are moving at the right pace or ahead of the curve, against 66 percent globally. The gap suggests that the challenge lies in translating ambition into action, rather than a lack of intent. Importantly, 84 percent still expect headcount to increase over the next three years, versus 89 percent globally—suggesting that AI is reshaping the composition of employment rather than simply eliminating jobs.



Source: KPMG 2026 CEO Outlook survey, Africa vs Global; figures rounded. See accompanying survey comparisons.

Workforce confidence is not yet matched by execution

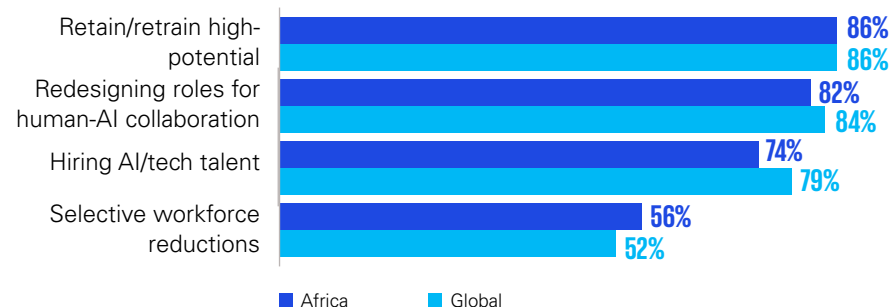
The findings suggest that the ability to execute workforce change may increasingly distinguish organisations that realise value from AI from those that struggle to scale it. Aligning technology investment with workforce planning, leadership accountability and the redesign of everyday work will be important if optimism is to translate into measurable performance.

Workforce transformation

Redesigning work as roles shift

African CEOs are pursuing a portfolio of workforce responses. Some 86 percent intend to retain and retrain high-potential employees, 82 percent are redesigning roles, career paths and team structures for human–AI collaboration, and 74 percent are hiring AI and technology talent. At the same time, 56 percent anticipate reductions in selected workforce areas, compared with 52 percent globally.

Rather than being contradictory, these findings point to a rebalancing of the workforce. Organisations are investing in existing talent and building AI capabilities, while selectively reducing roles in areas where workforce needs are changing. The strategic opportunity lies in managing the transition deliberately, identifying which activities to automate, which roles to augment and where people should be redeployed.



Source: KPMG 2026 CEO Outlook survey; Africa and Global long-term workforce strategies. Percentages rounded.

A more integrated approach to workforce transformation

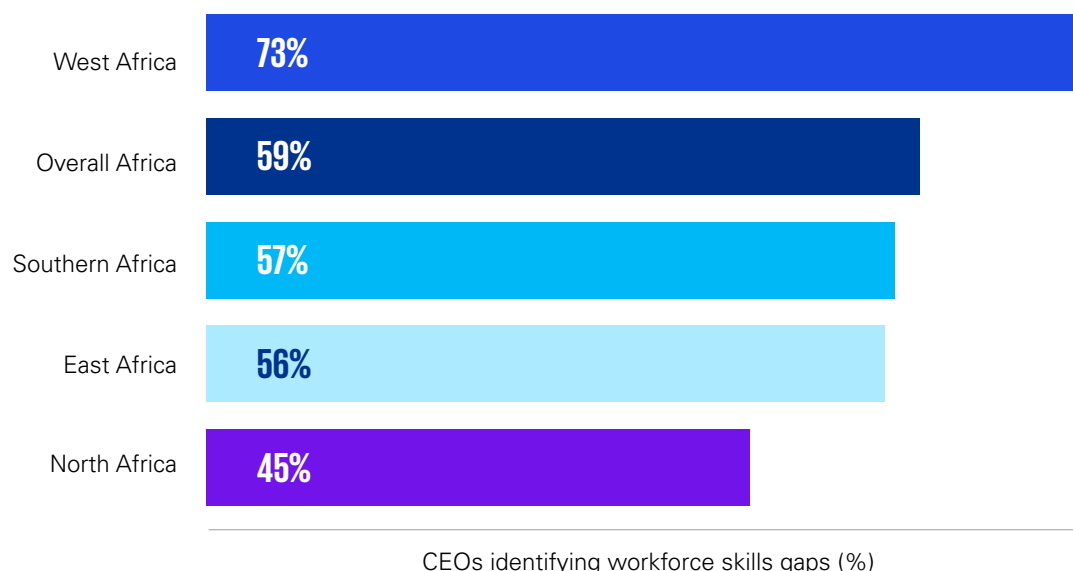
These shifts suggest that recruitment, learning and organisational design can no longer be considered in isolation. A more integrated approach links future capability requirements to growth ambitions, creates pathways for employees to move into emerging roles and maintains clear communication about how AI will affect work. Such measures can help sustain employee trust while supporting productivity and retention.

The operating-model question is especially important: introducing AI into unchanged processes can entrench inefficiency, while removing roles before governance and controls mature may introduce new risks. Workforce transformation therefore requires coordinated decisions across business leadership, technology, risk and people functions.

Skills and Leadership

Closing the capability gap is the decisive execution test

Across Africa, 59 percent of CEOs identify workforce skills gaps and 58 percent cite AI upskilling and training among their challenges; 52 percent point to attracting and retaining talent. More specifically, 44 percent identify the gap between current and required skills as their biggest challenge in attracting and retaining AI and digital talent. These pressures indicate that competing for scarce specialists is only one part of the solution.



Source: KPMG 2026 CEO Outlook, Q27 (workforce skills gaps), regional comparisons. North Africa (n=20) includes 16 respondents from North African countries (80%) and four from Francophone African countries (20%). Regional samples vary; comparisons are descriptive.

Moving from AI awareness to practical capability

The wider Africa contribution indicates that 37 percent provide tailored role-specific AI training, compared with approximately 46 percent globally, while 45 percent use external AI specialists versus 34 percent globally. External expertise can accelerate adoption, but long-term value depends on deliberate knowledge transfer, internal ownership and practical learning tied to real workflows.

“The future of work will be defined by how organisations invest in their people. As AI and emerging technologies reshape the workplace, leaders must focus on building the skills, adaptability and leadership capabilities needed to unlock human potential and drive sustained performance.”



Segun Sowande

Partner and Head of Clients and Markets, KPMG One Africa

Leadership capabilities matter as much as technical skills

African CEOs place greater weight on risk identification and management (51 percent, versus 39 percent globally) and agility and faster decision making (50 percent, versus 47 percent). This emphasis underlines the value of leaders who can combine digital fluency with sound judgement and guide employees through uncertainty. In practice, the effectiveness of capability investment will be reflected not only in participation in training but also in the quality of decisions, employee mobility, operational resilience and business performance.

Regional Perspectives

Different workforce pressures, one continental imperative

West Africa

Converting workforce expansion into productivity

Nine in ten West African CEOs anticipate headcount growth and 90 percent prioritise retaining and retraining high-potential talent. Yet skills gaps remain pronounced, with 73 percent citing workforce skills shortages in the consolidated regional submission. The priority is to turn hiring intentions into stronger execution capacity through targeted development, internal mobility and a culture that supports change. Notably, 23 percent cite adapting organisational culture to employee expectations as a talent challenge, compared with 13 percent globally.

Southern Africa

Scaling capability while retaining scarce talent

Workforce redesign is particularly visible: 87 percent are reshaping roles and teams for human-AI collaboration, 84 percent plan to retain and retrain high-potential employees and 79 percent are hiring AI and technology talent. However, 61 percent cite attracting and retaining talent as a workforce challenge. Organisations must balance advanced redesign with employee experience, succession planning and the retention of specialist and leadership capability.

North Africa

Internal development as a response to skills scarcity

In North Africa, 45 percent of CEOs identify workforce skills gaps and 60 percent cite AI upskilling and training as workforce challenges, compared with 59 percent and 58 percent across Africa, respectively. While 81 percent intend to retain and retrain high-potential employees, half identify the gap between current and required AI capabilities as their principal AI talent challenge, compared with 44 percent across Africa. These findings reinforce the importance of building internal capability pipelines, providing role-specific development and supporting employees as work evolves. Given the relatively small regional sample, the results should be interpreted directionally.

Interpreting the wider regional picture

East Africa

Building the skills to sustain transformation

In East Africa, 56 percent cite workforce skills gaps and 64 percent identify AI upskilling and training as a workforce challenge, compared with 59 percent and 58 percent across Africa. Although 86 percent plan to retain and retrain high-potential talent, the findings highlight the importance of translating training commitments into applied, role-specific capability.

Turning workforce ambition into sustainable performance

Across the regions, a consistent message emerges: investment in technology must be matched by investment in people. For African CEOs, this means anticipating future skills requirements, tailoring learning to specific roles and equipping leaders to manage change. Organisations that combine these efforts with thoughtful workforce redesign and internal knowledge transfer may be better positioned to improve productivity, retain critical talent and sustain performance through change. The opportunity extends beyond creating an AI-ready workforce to building more adaptable and resilient businesses.