



# Employer Branding **NOW 2024**

A survey of over 800 talent leaders shows how best-in-class global companies are redefining recruiting and hiring practices to compete in a fast-changing world.

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Survey Field Period  
**February 2024 - April 2024**

Includes **876** talent leaders  
from **50 countries**.

## Talent Leader Survey Respondents

**876** Total  
Respondents

**35**  
Industries

**50**  
Countries

### This includes:

**274**

responses from  
small- to medium-  
sized enterprises with  
fewer than 1,000  
employees (SMEs)

**269**

responses from  
organizations with  
1,000 to 10,000  
employees (Large)

**324**

responses from  
organizations with  
more than 10,000  
employees (Very  
Large)

## The WMAE Cohort

This data represents the responses from **52 of the 90 World's Most Attractive Employers (WMAEs)**.

Universum, one of the world's leading Employer Branding companies, surveyed **876** talent leaders from **50** countries between **February 27 and April 19, 2024**. The aim was to gather insights about current employer branding practices as well as to learn from the World's Most Attractive Employers (WMAEs).

## Why follow the WMAEs?

The World's Most Attractive Employers (WMAEs) are 90 organizations that have been identified as the most attractive employers across 9 leading global economies: Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, the UK, and the US. To be named a WMAE, companies need to rank among the top employers in at least 5 of these 9 major economies in the eyes of those who participate in Universum's global student survey. In this Employer Branding NOW study, we have highlighted the employer branding strategies of the most attractive global employers to understand what they do differently and what other organizations can do to emulate their best practices.



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01

# Trends Worth Watching



## Challenging hiring environment persists

Over half (54%) of talent leaders expect the hiring environment to become more challenging over the next 12 months. The shortage of specific high-demand skills – particularly relating to IT and engineering talent – are a rising threat to growth and innovation.

## Employer Branding remains a key tactic to attract critical talent groups

More than two in three (68%) talent professionals working for the World's Most Attractive Employers (WMAE) say Employer Branding is a top priority. And the majority say “inspiring purpose” is a critical component of their Employer Value Proposition (EVP) – a phrase that encompasses everything from the company's mission, to connecting employees to the impact of their work. The majority of the WMAE and companies with over 10,000 employees are putting greater emphasis on adapting their EVP messaging to different target groups.

## Internship programs shrinking modestly, possibly due to remote working

With so many employees working from home, companies are finding it difficult to provide meaningful work experiences for interns. Universum's research finds that 15% of companies in the WMAE are shrinking their internship programs, and another 54% report keeping investments flat.

## Internal mobility, a growing priority

A third of talent professionals at the largest companies claim that “internal mobility” has become a top priority, supported by a consistent global skills framework, performance management regime, open job posting and increasingly sophisticated ‘matching’ platforms similar to those by external job boards.

## Employers seek professionals who can pivot in the face of disruption

While technical skills are still important, employers are also in search of ‘soft skills’ that prove an employee can adapt to a fast-changing workplace environment. In 2024, talent professionals identified problem solving, collaboration and adaptability as the most important qualities required for an AI-powered workplace.

## Employers must ensure their recruiting efforts maintain a ‘human’ touch

Some AI tools like chatbots, which can deliver one-to-one messaging using genAI and machine learning, make the recruiting process significantly more efficient. But employers must ensure the candidate experience includes memorable, human touches amidst all the AI-driven touchpoints. This includes an increasing emphasis on in-person events on campus.



02

# Hiring is up in 2024; so are the challenges



The global economy is projected to grow at a steady but modest 3.2% pace in 2024 and 2025,

according to major international organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) — and hiring growth is mirroring global economic growth.<sup>1</sup> ManPower’s most recent Hiring Outlook pegs talent hiring growth at **3% compared to 12 months prior.**<sup>2</sup>

Given this steady growth, it’s no surprise that companies are still reporting significant challenges in the hiring environment, particularly related to hiring critical talent. Over half (**54%**) of companies in the WMAE report that hiring is becoming harder compared to 12 months ago. That same ManPower data finds **75%** of talent professionals are struggling to find skilled talent — near a historic high.

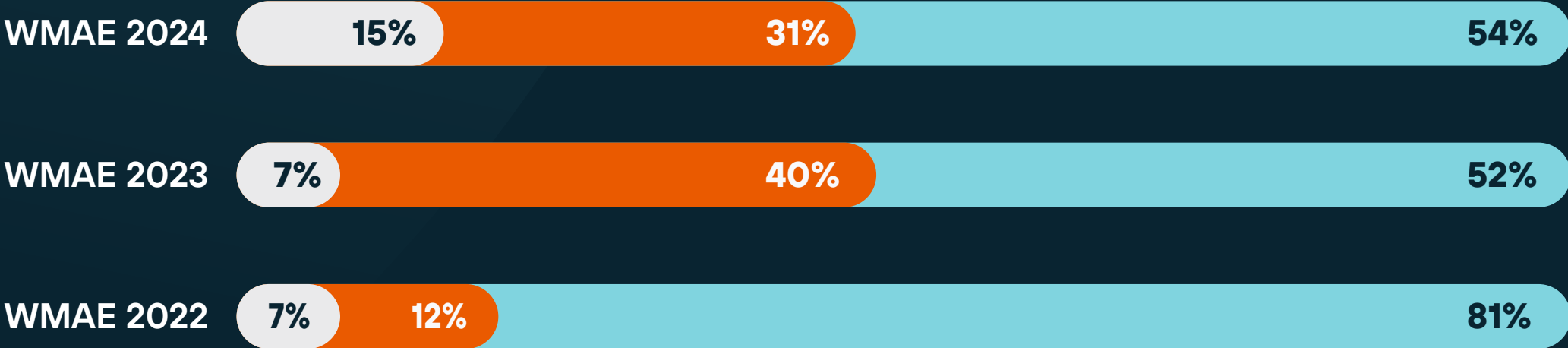
“**Talent leaders are coping with another year of hiring headwinds,**” says Universum’s VP of Business Development, Claes Peyron. “What makes this year different, however, is the way advances in generative AI and machine learning are disrupting not only how employers hire talent, but the mix of roles and skills that are required in an AI-driven environment.”

<sup>1</sup> International Monetary Fund. (2024, April 16). World Economic Outlook, April 2024: Steady but Slow: Resilience amid Divergence. Retrieved from <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2024/04/16/world-economic-outlook-april-2024>

<sup>2</sup> ManpowerGroup. “Q1 2024 ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey.” ManpowerGroup, 11 Apr. 2024, [workforce-re-sources.manpowergroup.com/home/q1-2024-manpowergroup-employment-outlook-survey](https://workforce-re-sources.manpowergroup.com/home/q1-2024-manpowergroup-employment-outlook-survey). Accessed 17 May 2024.

Hiring environment remains challenging

Do you expect the general hiring environment to get harder or easier over the next 12 months?



Source: EB Now Survey 2024, Universum



Despite positive — even if modest — hiring growth rates, companies seem to be pulling back from internship programs in 2024. The Universum research shows that even though companies report challenges hiring high-value talent, budgets for internships are either flat or falling — a confusing set of findings given that internship programs are often pipelines for attracting high-potential talent early in their careers.

In some cases, the drop in internships may be a cost-cutting measure, such as Tesla famously rescinding offers just weeks before the interns were set to begin.<sup>3</sup> But there's another simpler and potentially long-lasting explanation for this finding: with more employees working from home, companies are struggling to design meaningful internship programs for young professionals, who benefit from in-person mentorship. One reddit user explains that their company's new-hire and intern success rates "nosedived" after employees began working remotely.

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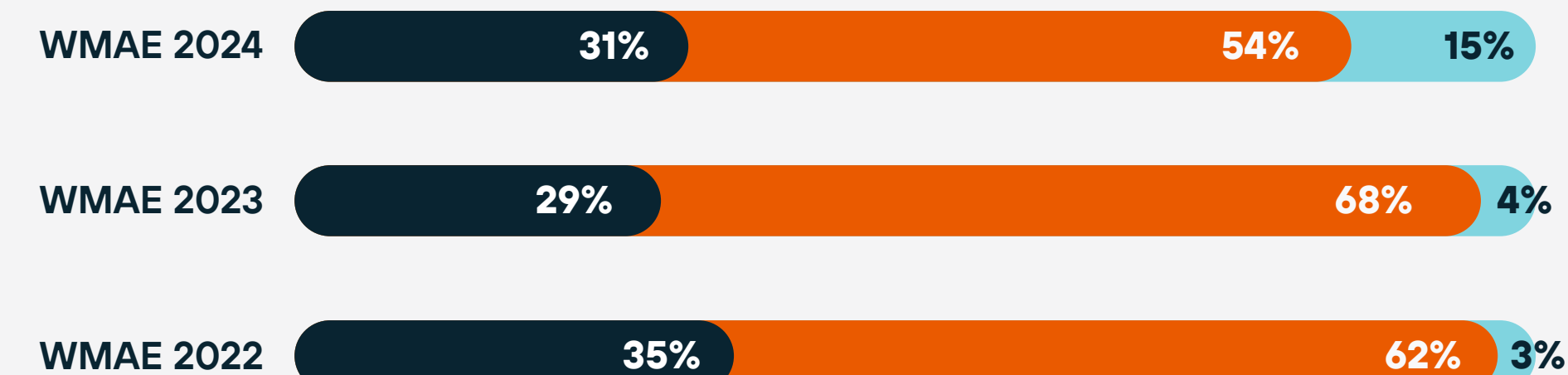
**He reports,** “It was insanely difficult [for interns/new hires] to ramp with systems or get questions answered being remote. **It was much easier to focus and get coding work done remote[ly],** but learning the basics and getting answers from team members was soooo much harder.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Carlson, Kara. “Tesla Interns Say Offers Are Getting Revoked Weeks Before Their Start Date.” Bloomberg, 1 May 2024, [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-05-01/tesla-tsla-interns-are-the-latest-target-after-elon-musk-s-layoffs](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-05-01/tesla-tsla-interns-are-the-latest-target-after-elon-musk-s-layoffs). Accessed 17 May 2024.

<sup>4</sup> u/throwaway12345. “Remote Work Spiked New Hire Intern Failure Rates.” Reddit, 3 Aug. 2023, [www.reddit.com/r/csMajors/comments/15peir2/remote\\_work\\_spiked\\_new\\_hire\\_intern\\_failure\\_rates/](https://www.reddit.com/r/csMajors/comments/15peir2/remote_work_spiked_new_hire_intern_failure_rates/). Accessed 17 May 2024.

## Marginal decline in internship programs

*What is the plan for your intern program over the coming year?*  
% among those running intern programs



■ Increasing ■ Maintaining ■ Decreasing

Source: EB Now Survey 2024, Universum

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**With more employees working from home,** companies are struggling to design meaningful internship programs for young professionals, who benefit from in-person mentorship

03

# Employer Branding viewed as a top priority





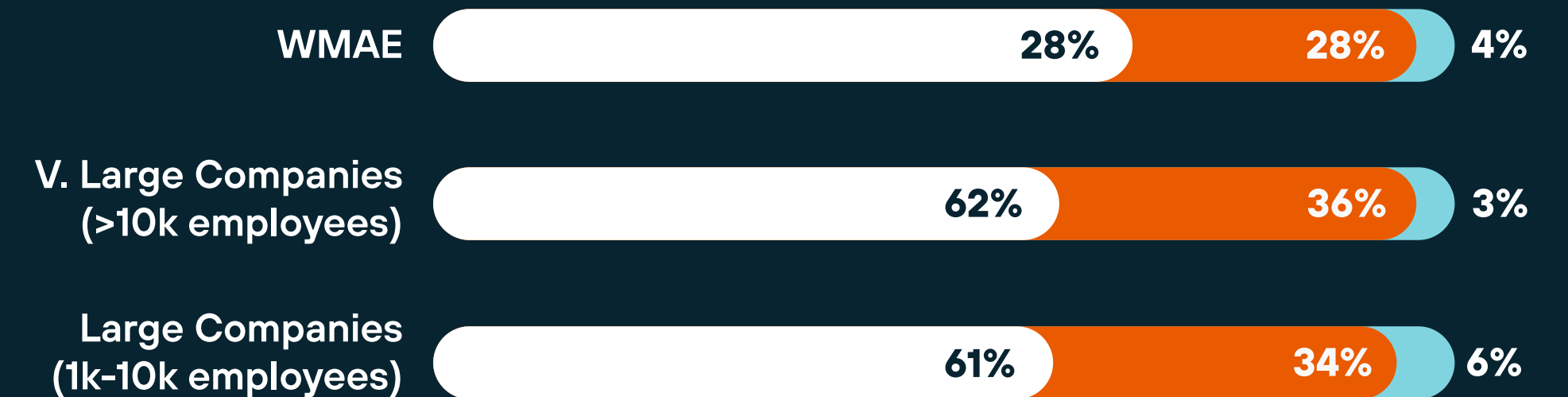
68%

**Given hiring challenges, Employer Branding is still a top priority for most companies.** That's especially so for the World's Most Attractive Employers, **68%** of which deem it "one of the top priorities." Mercer reports similar findings. In its 2024 Global Talent Trends, "enhancing the EX/EVP to attract & retain top talent" is the most common focus area for talent leaders in 2024 — ranking higher than critical issues like improving workforce planning and redesigning work for AI and automation.<sup>5</sup>

For the WMAE, the average spend on recruitment marketing and all other forms of employer brand building is US\$3.7 million annually.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mercer.com/insights/people-strategy/future-of-work/global-talent-trends/>

## Employer Branding still a top priority



One of top priorities
  Important but not a top priority
  Not a priority

Source: EB Now Survey 2024, Universum

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**US\$3.7  
million**

Average spent on recruitment marketing and employer branding by the World's Most Attractive Employers.



## Employers put increasing emphasis on 'inspiring purpose'

What are the most common attributes included in the EVP?

Among the WMAE,  
**60% mention  
inspiring purpose**  
*(up 5 points since last year).*

Among all companies surveyed, inspiring purpose was the most common,

**with 44%  
citing it**  
*(up 11 points in  
12 months).*

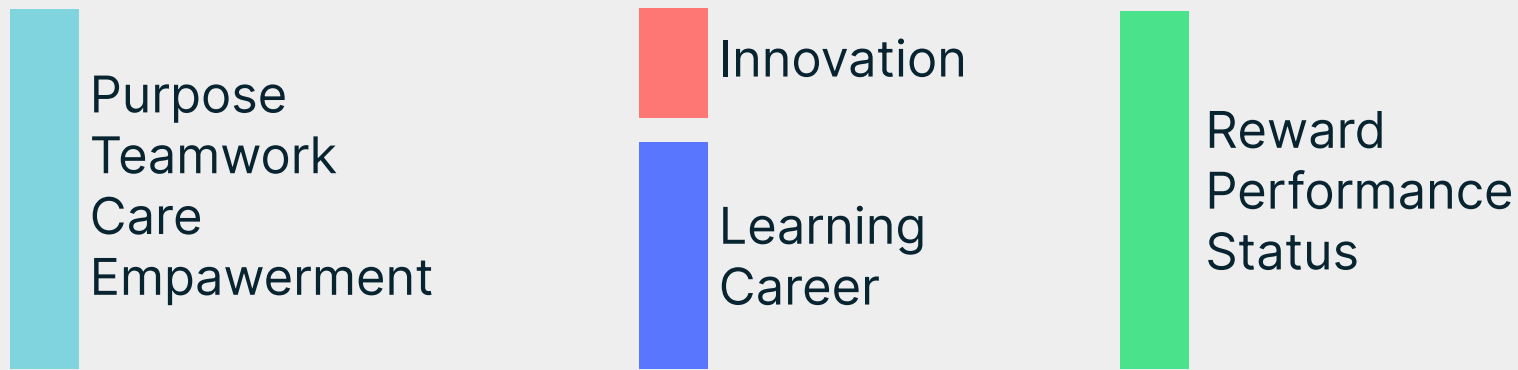
Given the prevalence of “purpose” within EVPs, it’s important that employers find ways to emphasize it in a way that feels differentiated and true to the lived experience of their employees.

A big challenge is what McKinsey calls the “purpose gap,” or the difference in the proportion of executives and upper management who report finding purpose at work (85%), versus frontline managers and frontline employees (15%).<sup>6</sup> The study authors explain the implications of these findings, in measures such as employee performance and turnover: “Less satisfied respondents reported lower average work and life outcomes than more satisfied peers did—everything from reduced feelings of energy and life satisfaction to lower engagement, satisfaction, and excitement about work. Negative work and life outcomes for employees inevitably translate to negative outcomes for the business.”

<sup>6</sup> McKinsey & Company. “Help Your Employees Find Purpose—or Watch Them Leave.” McKinsey & Company, 25 Apr. 2024, [www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/help-your-employees-find-purpose-or-watch-them-leave](https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/help-your-employees-find-purpose-or-watch-them-leave). Accessed 17 May 2024.



Inspiring purpose is a top EVP component



		VS. 2023
Inspiring Purpose	44%	+11%
Training & Development	30%	-1%
Flexible Working	25%	-1%
Friendly Environment	25%	+1%
Diversity & Inclusion	23%	-15%
Sustainability	22%	NA
Personal Impact	21%	-10%

7 <https://www.mercer.com/insights/people-strategy/future-of-work/global-talent-trends/>

8 Wall Street Journal. "Diversity Goals Are Disappearing From Companies' Annual Reports." Wall Street Journal, 21 Apr. 2024, [www.wsj.com/business/diversity-goals-are-disappearing-from-companies-annual-reports-459d1ef3](https://www.wsj.com/business/diversity-goals-are-disappearing-from-companies-annual-reports-459d1ef3). Accessed 17 May 2024.

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Organizations are taking the opportunity to reset their People strategy to intentionally build more sustainable, more inspiring, less exhausting work models.<sup>7</sup>



Kate Bravery,  
Senior Partner at Mercer

DE&I a priority for many employers, even while some are scaling back messaging

Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) is still common among the World's Most Attractive Employers; 46% cite it, up 8 points from last year. But among companies overall, DE&I appears to be dropping from EVPs; currently 23% cite it, down 15 points from last year.

A study by the Wall Street Journal shows this pullback has much less to do with underlying values, and more to do with legal uncertainty. It reports, "Dozens of companies altered descriptions of diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in their annual reports to investors as DEI programs come under legal and political threat. [...] Lawyers and other experts say the disclosure changes reflect uncertainty about the legal parameters of diversity programs along with wariness of political backlash following the [U.S.] Supreme Court's 2023 decision overturning affirmative action in college admissions."<sup>8</sup>

# Make smarter decisions with Universum's Employer Brand and Talent Insights



**Understand what talent is looking for in an employer** so you can communicate messages that are relevant to your target audience.



Know **what talent thinks of you as an employer** vs. **your competitors** in order to better differentiate your Employer Brand.



**Identify the overlaps and gaps** between what talent wants and what they think of you as an employer.



**Measure your employer brand year over year** to ensure your Employer Brand and recruitment activities are paying off.



**Identify the best channels** to spend your time and money communicating with the target audience.





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04

# The Great Skills Reset



As in previous years, employers are hyper-focused on attracting and hiring for particular technical roles and skills — positions in IT, digital marketing and software engineering to name just a few. All rank highly as hard-to-attract roles.

**Even among the Worlds’ Most Attractive Employers, 63% report challenges hiring IT and digital roles, and 40% say hiring engineers is a challenge.**

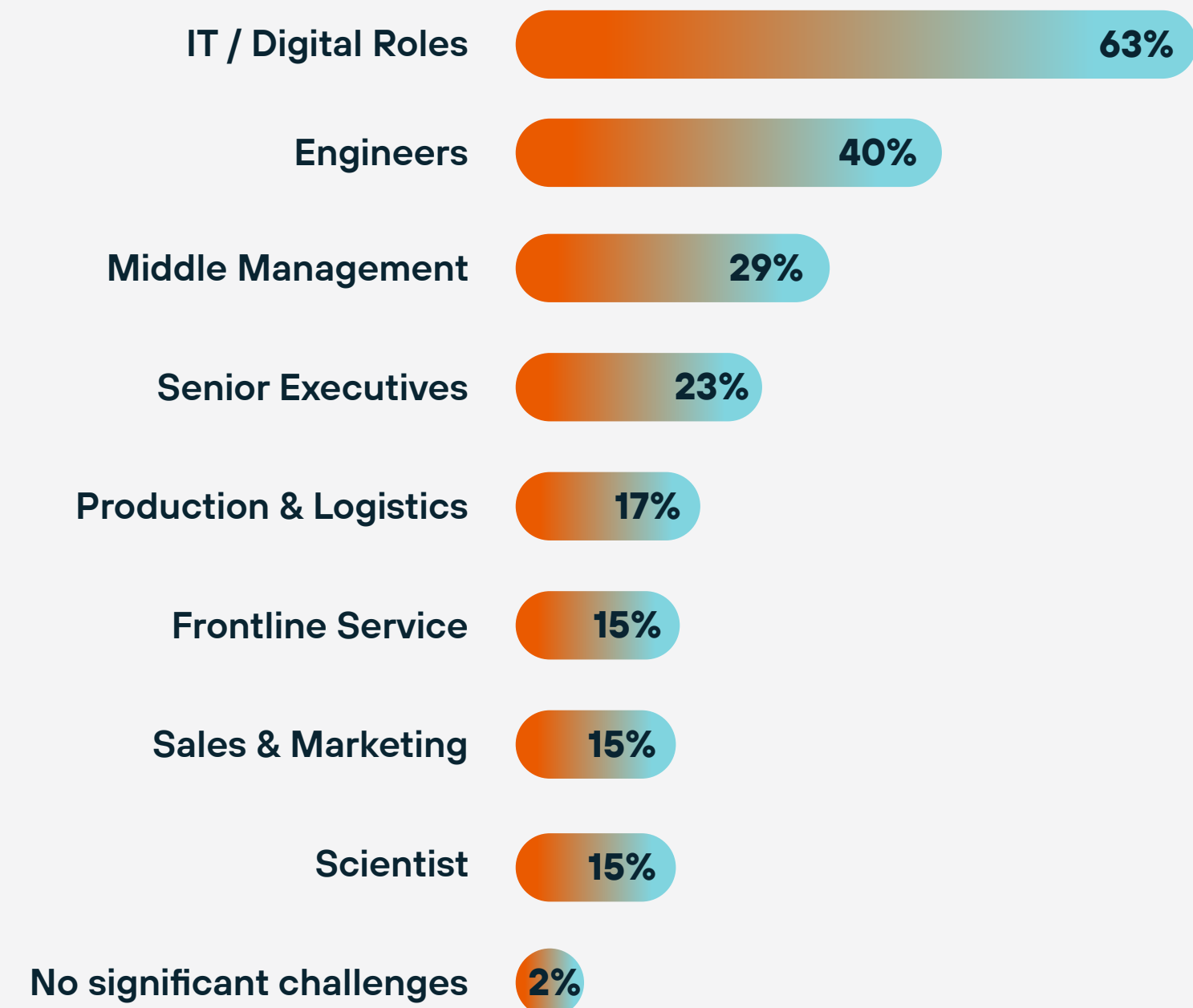
Given the widespread competition for certain talent groups, some employers are recruiting promising candidates at younger ages (i.e., pre-college). Korn Ferry, a global talent consulting firm, reports: “In 2024, recruiters will cast their net wider. Larger employers will woo candidates while they’re still in high school. Others will search for hires in technical and non-traditional higher education institutions.”<sup>9</sup> The reasons, in Korn Ferry’s analysis, are twofold: the desire to hire people who have lower salary expectations, as well as a belief that by casting the net wider, they can more easily meet their DE&I objectives.

<sup>9</sup> Korn Ferry. “Talent Acquisition Trends 2024.” Korn Ferry, 29 Mar. 2024, [www.kornferry.com/insights/featured-to-pics/talent-recruitment/talent-acquisition-trends-2024](https://www.kornferry.com/insights/featured-to-pics/talent-recruitment/talent-acquisition-trends-2024). Accessed 17 May 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Society for Human Resource Management. (2024, March 30). 2024 talent acquisition trends led by GenAI, skills-based hiring. SHRM. <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/talent-acquisition/shrm-2024-talent-acquisition-trends-genai-skills-based-hiring>

IT and digital roles are hardest-to-hire

WMAE – Leading Global Employers



Source: EB Now Survey 2024, Universum

“Skills-based hiring means evaluating candidates for their capacity to learn and acquire new skills, rather than traditional evaluation criteria such as past job titles, education or even work experience.”<sup>10</sup>

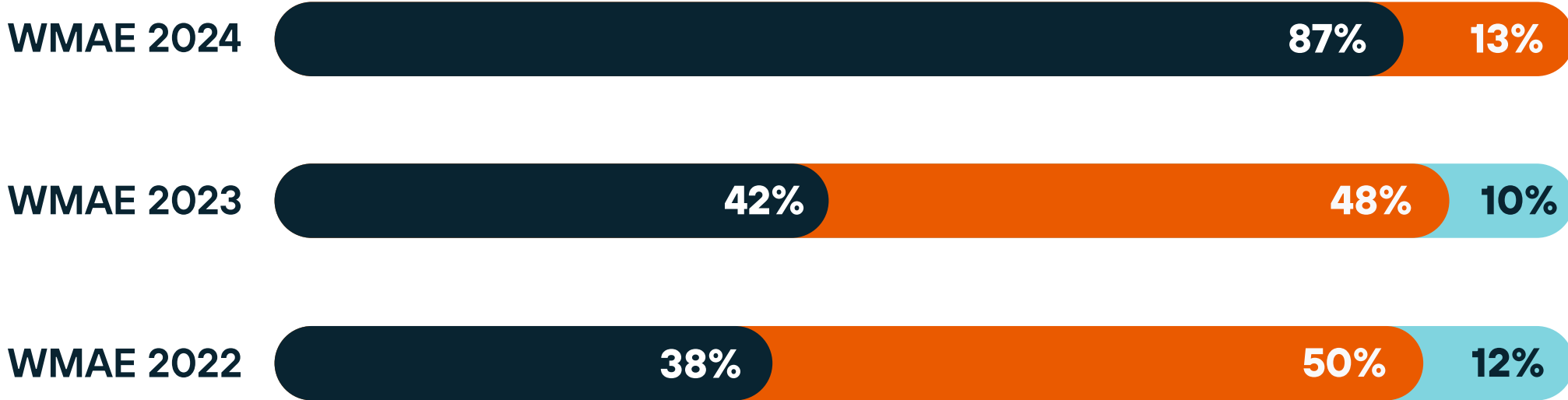
Society for Human Resource Management



Given talent shortages in key areas, upskilling is coming into focus as a mission-critical tactic for companies to access hard-to-hire skills — this year and beyond. And upskilling has become even more important as AI tools and machine learning reshape the mix (and number) of employees needed to staff internal teams. “Departments such as IT services and marketing will be highly affected by AI, and we’re seeing changes already,” says Universum Senior Consultant, Richard Mosley. “Some types of coders, content creators, and designers — among many, many others — will be replaced or augmented by AI in the near future. Sophisticated talent brands are reskilling employees to either move laterally into new areas of demand, or learn to work side-by-side with AI tools.”

**The Universum research shows 33% of talent leaders say internal mobility is a major priority, up 4 points from last year.**

Internal mobility is a key priority for employers



This is a major priority

We are seeking general improvements

This is not a focus for us right now

Source: EB Now Survey 2024 , Universum



Given the disruptive changes wrought by AI — particularly the way AI tools are changing the mix of skills required in the workplace — companies are increasingly willing to reward potential (i.e., does this individual have the ability to learn and adapt?) rather than direct experience. More and more, employers are zeroing in on qualities like problem-solving skills, ability to work effectively on teams, flexibility, and desire to learn.

In a roundtable discussion, the World Economic Forum asked CEOs how the advent of AI in the workplace is changing the ways companies target and hire employees. Their answers emphasized this shift in what employers are seeking. A sampling:<sup>11</sup>

**Arvind Krishna,**  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, IBM Corporation

“[AI] is the first technology that goes after the white-collar work or what I will call the lower half of cognitive work ... It doesn’t matter whether you’re a physicist, mathematician, a computer scientist, a doctor, a writer. If the lower half of cognitive work gets taken over by genAI, it implies that you’ve got to learn critical thinking. That means critical thinking, regardless of which domain you’re in, becomes the skill that is far, far more needed.”

**Julie Sweet,**  
Chair and CEO of Accenture

“We ask one question to every person, regardless of whether you’re a coder or you’re a strategist or you’re a doctor or you’re working in HR. We ask one interview question to everyone. We say: What have you learned in the last six months? We don’t care if it’s how to bake a cake, but we have to have people who like to learn. And that question is incredibly insightful; you have to have people who want to learn and build a learning culture.”<sup>12</sup>

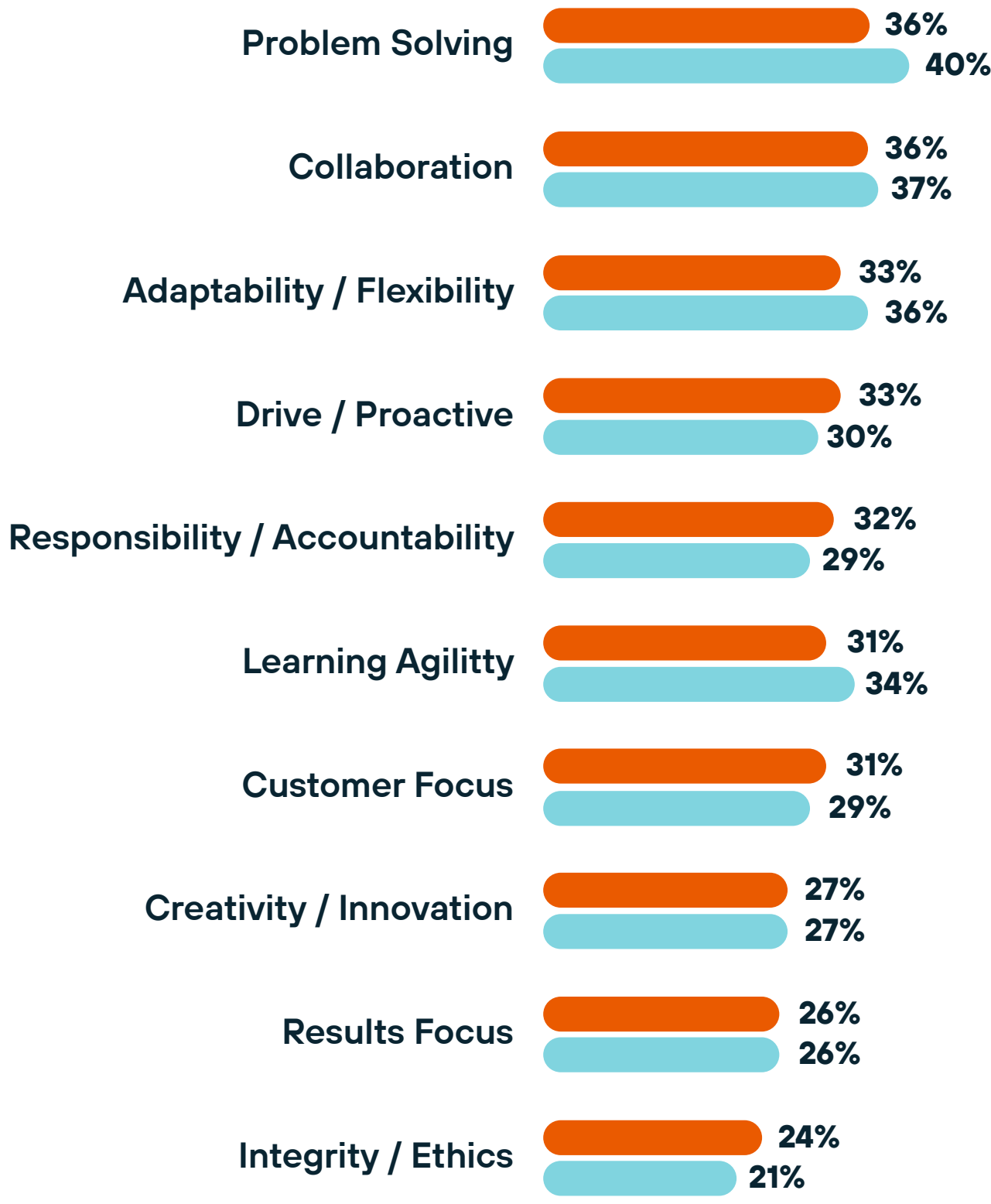


<sup>11</sup> World Economic Forum. “This is the one skill we all need in the Age of AI.” World Economic Forum, 16 Jan. 2024, [www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/01/this-is-the-one-skill-everybody-needs-in-the-age-of-ai/](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/01/this-is-the-one-skill-everybody-needs-in-the-age-of-ai/). Accessed 17 May 2024.

<sup>12</sup> World Economic Forum. “This is the one skill we all need in the Age of AI.” World Economic Forum, 16 Jan. 2024, [www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/01/this-is-the-one-skill-everybody-needs-in-the-age-of-ai/](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/01/this-is-the-one-skill-everybody-needs-in-the-age-of-ai/). Accessed 17 May 2024.



Sought-after qualities for new employees



Which qualities do you most look for in recruits? (2023)

Which qualities do you believe will be more important with the increasing use of AI? (2024)







05

# How AI is reshaping talent management



Even while companies are racing to invest in genAI strategies and tools to drive cost savings and supercharge innovation, many are finding that AI skills (or the lack thereof) is hampering the process.

Research from i4cp shows that while developing genAI skills is a top priority for talent leaders, most also say it's their biggest weakness.<sup>13</sup> And research from Pluralsight finds that while 92% of companies say they are speeding up AI initiatives, 80% of executive leaders and 72% of IT professionals agree that their organizations are investing in these initiatives without planning for the employee reskilling that may be required to use these technologies. And 90% of executives say they do not know their team's current AI skill level.<sup>14</sup>

# 80%

**Executive leaders who agree their organizations are investing in genAI without planning for employee reskilling (Pluralsight)**

<sup>13</sup> Society for Human Resource Management. "2024 Talent Acquisition Trends Led by GenAI, Skills-Based Hiring." SHRM, 30 Mar. 2024, [www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/talent-acquisition/shrm-2024-talent-acquisition-trends-genai-skills-based-hiring](https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/talent-acquisition/shrm-2024-talent-acquisition-trends-genai-skills-based-hiring). Accessed 17 May 2024.

<sup>14</sup> "AI Literacy Gap Extends Beyond Technical Skills." Help Net Security, 8 Dec. 2023, [www.helpnetsecurity.com/2023/12/08/employees-ai-skills/](https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2023/12/08/employees-ai-skills/). Accessed 17 May 2024.



## How will genAI technology disrupt the recruiting industry?

AI will dramatically reshape recruiting teams, processes and strategies. As Bryan Ackermann, head of AI strategy and transformation at Korn Ferry, explains “[AI] writes job descriptions. It powers prescreening video interviews and assesses candidates to find the best matches for roles. Recruitment chatbots can even answer candidates’ questions in real time. Used in the right way, AI saves money and time.”<sup>15</sup>

## And new applications for genAI in recruiting are showing up all the time.

Companies can use generative AI to: \_\_\_\_\_



**Craft highly personalized** and engaging job descriptions tailored to specific roles, company cultures, and target candidate personas.



Interact with candidates, answer their questions, provide job details, and guide them through the application process – all using conversational AIs like chatbots. Universum’s research shows that adoption of chatbots for recruiting is on the rise. **Among the WMAE, 52% are using chatbots for talent attraction and acquisition, up 11 points since 2021.**



Assist in preparing interview questions aligned with the role and candidate profile. It can also analyze candidate responses during interviews, providing insights into their skills, personality traits, and cultural fit, aiding in objective evaluation.



By analyzing vast amounts of data, **AIs can identify patterns and predict factors that contribute to successful hires**, such as job performance, retention rates, and cultural alignment. This enables data-driven hiring decisions and improves the quality of hires.



Streamline the scheduling process by automatically coordinating interviews, sending reminders, and handling rescheduling requests. It can also generate personalized communication at various stages of the recruitment process, improving efficiency and candidate experience.

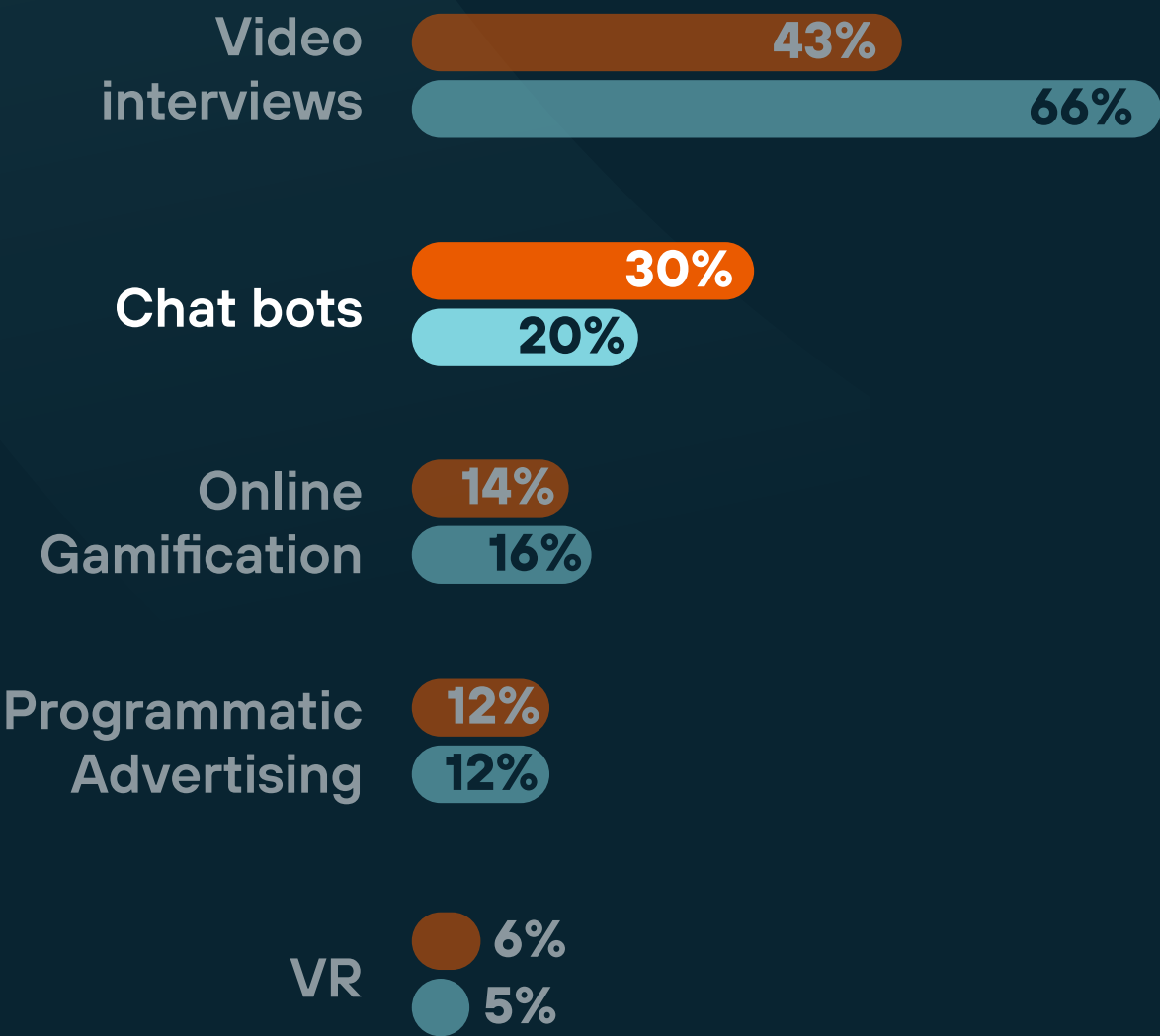


**Identify and mitigate biases in job descriptions**, candidate sourcing, and evaluation processes, promoting diversity and inclusion in hiring practices.

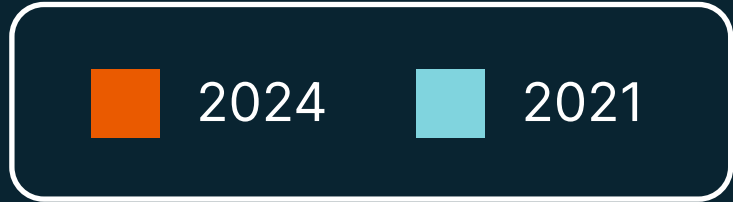
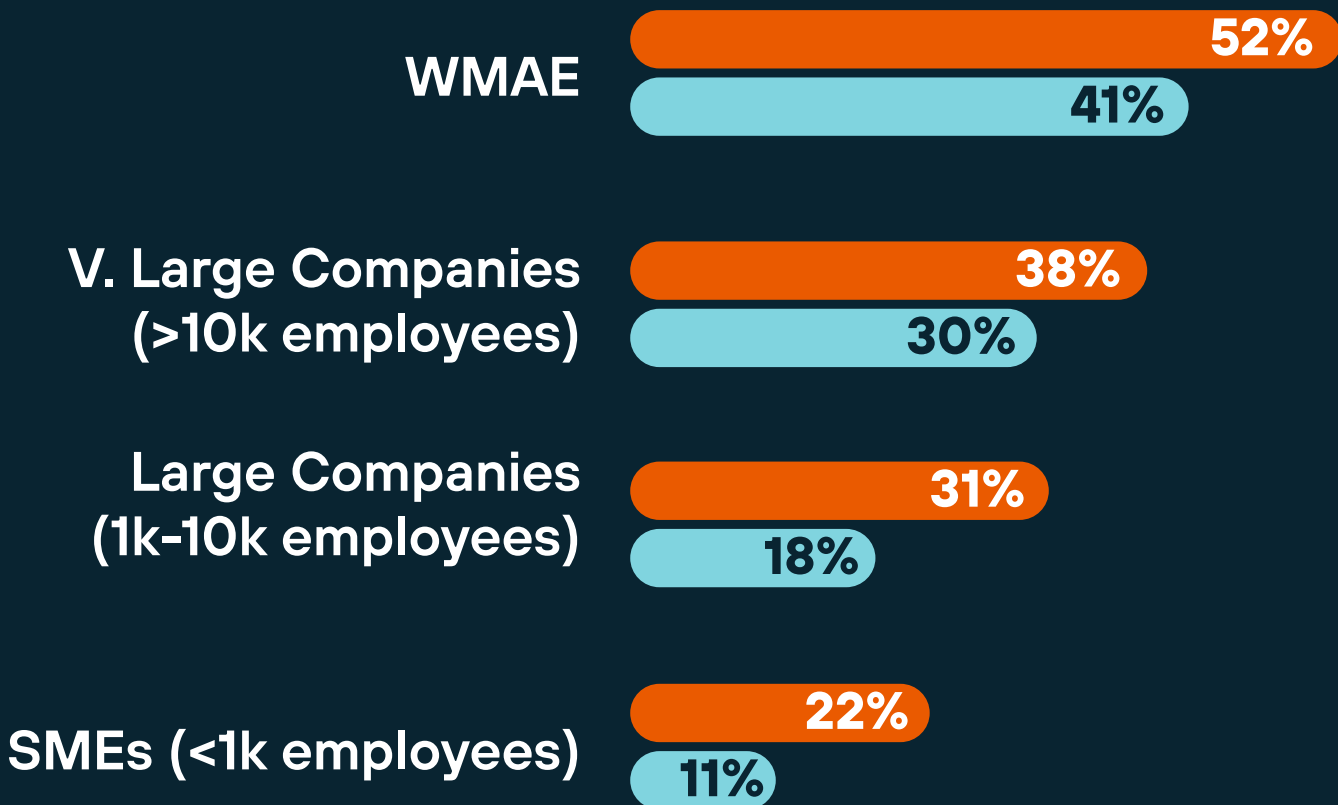
<sup>15</sup> Society for Human Resource Management. (2024, March 30). 2024 Talent Acquisition Trends Led by GenAI, Skills-Based Hiring. Retrieved from <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/talent-acquisition/shrm-2024-talent-acquisition-trends-genai-skills-based-hiring>



Chatbot use on the rise



Chat Bot Implementation



Source: EB Now Survey 2024 (Total Sample – 876)



06

# Lessons from the World's Most Attractive Employers





Each year we examine the lessons employer brand leaders can extract from the behaviors and strategies of the World's Most Attractive Employers.

Continue to update your AI roadmap

Employers are already focused on integrating AI technologies into the recruiting workflow – yet much more work must be done. Talent leaders must also ensure new technologies and processes are fair and transparent, and do not introduce any potential biases. And they must invest in continuous learning and development programs to upskill employees, enabling them to adapt to new AI-driven workflows and maintain a competitive edge.

Take steps to keep human voices and touchpoints in the recruiting process

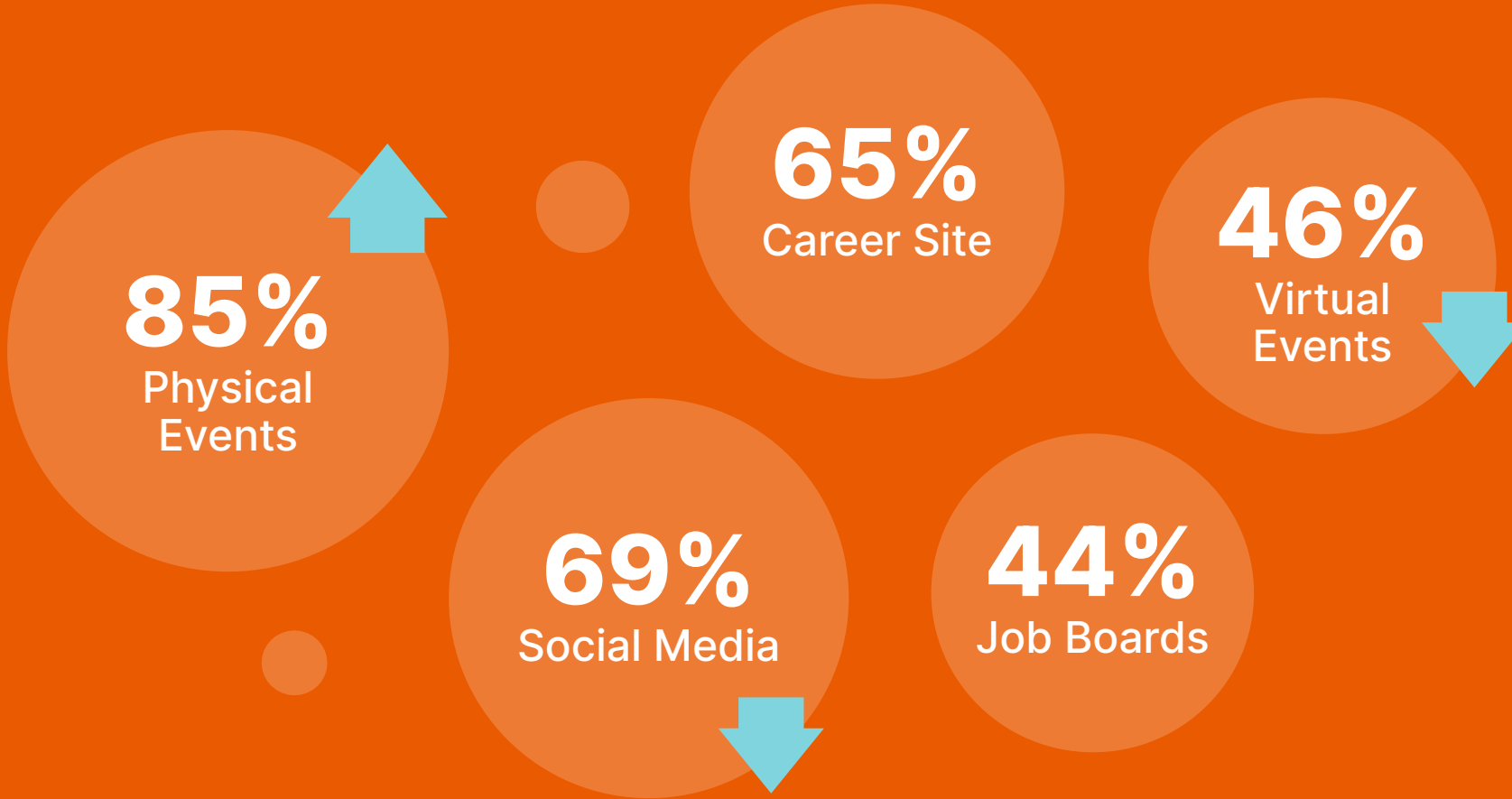
Given all the promising new AI and automation tools, talent leaders must protect the human element in candidates' experiences. While chatbots and automated messaging are useful, talent professionals report that in-person contact remains critical. For example, 85% of the WMAE cite in-person events as the most important channel for on-campus recruitment – up 14 points since 2023.

Top channels for students

2023



2024





## Leverage automations to streamline the recruiting process

With so much talk about AI, don't forget about the important role of automation to streamline the recruiting process – from automated communications with candidates or interview scheduling, to publishing a weekly report that captures key performance metrics. Automations can significantly improve the recruiting process by making it more efficient, less biased and more candidate-friendly.

## Revamp employee onboarding with remote working in mind

If a portion of your critical talent works remotely, it's time to rethink both internship programs and onboarding programs. Do entry-level employees have enough facetime and mentorship opportunities with more experienced talent? Are processes and technical knowledge documented for new employees to access and develop? Do they feel connected to a workplace community?

As one IT worker explained, "Onboarding entry level people onto remote teams is doable, but the approach has to change. If processes are disorganized and knowledge is locked in some senior developer's head rather than consistently documented, then it's a setup for failure."

## Consider hiring for *potential*, not technical experience, to close the talent gap

In a highly disrupted workplace, the most valuable employees are those who are unafraid to **pivot quickly, learn new skills and adapt to a changing environment**. By dropping formal qualifications, such as a university degree or specific certifications, employers can expand their talent pool and tap into a more diverse and inclusive workforce.





## Now that you've uncovered the key findings, it's time to transform these insights into actionable strategies!

Universum's Employer Branding services bridge the gap between research and action. Leverage our data expertise to develop fair AI strategies and optimize automation for a smooth candidate experience.

Universum's Employer Brand & Talent Insights empowers you to attract diverse talent by focusing on what talent prioritizes. We also guide you in building a strong Employer Brand equipt to target your target talent groups. Let's turn your findings into a winning Employer Brand & Talent Acquisition strategy and execution!

Contact us today for a free consultation! →



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