

New Research: 100% of NZ Organisations Navigating Major Change as Leadership Capability Crisis Deepens

Annual study of senior HR leaders reveals concerning trends in workplace resilience, leadership readiness, and external pressures on staff

AUCKLAND, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND, January 28, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- New research released today by Tomorrow's People reveals that 100% of New Zealand organisations are currently managing significant change, up from 85% in 2025, signalling that constant transformation has become the permanent operating condition for Kiwi businesses.



The conversation has shifted from 'how do we survive this?' to 'how do we build sustainable approaches when pressure never lets up?'"

Jane Ward

The annual HR in Aotearoa research, now in its third year, is based on in-depth interviews with 50 senior HR leaders across diverse sectors and organisation sizes throughout New Zealand.

Key Findings:

Leadership Capability Crisis

Only 10% of organisations report their leaders are fully equipped for today's challenges, with 90% rating leadership capability as either "somewhat adequate" or "not adequate." The research identifies a persistent pattern of promoting technical experts into leadership roles without adequate development support.

External Pressures Dominate HR Challenges

For the first time, external pressures impacting staff—including cost of living, cumulative stress, and financial hardship—have emerged as the top challenge facing HR leaders, surpassing traditional concerns around systems, compliance, or technology.

AI Readiness Gap Widening

While 63% of organisations are actively preparing for AI and automation, anxiety about keeping pace is near-universal, even among those furthest along in their preparation. The research reveals a significant maturity gap, with only 15% of "active preparers" having moved beyond

planning into actual implementation.

HR Teams Under-Resourced

Only 24% of organisations report their HR teams are properly resourced, while 100% are navigating significant change. The research found an average HR team ratio of 1.6 HR people per 100 employees, with 76% of organisations operating with either inadequate or only somewhat adequate resourcing levels.

Technology Without Strategy

Despite 34% of organisations planning new HR technology investments in 2026, 91% operate without formal HR technology roadmaps. The research uncovered widespread challenges with vendor support post-implementation and poor system integration.

The Quiet Retreat on DEI

Only 9% of organisations mentioned diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) as a strategic priority for 2026, down from prominent positioning in 2025 research. The deprioritisation appears driven by competing pressures and resource constraints rather than philosophical shifts.

Additional Findings:

Average HR team size varies significantly by organisation size, from 4 people in small organisations to 54 in large enterprises

88% of organisations are planning leadership development initiatives in 2026, the highest priority area for people investment

Hybrid work has normalised, though return-to-office conversations continue privately within leadership teams

18% of organisations in the sample operate without any dedicated HRIS

"The conversation has shifted from 'how do we survive this?' to 'how do we build sustainable approaches when pressure never lets up?'" said [Jane Ward](#), CEO of Tomorrow's People and author of the research. "HR leaders are grappling with questions that extend far beyond traditional HR challenges—they're managing the spillover effects of external pressures that they fundamentally cannot solve."

The research highlights three interconnected challenges dominating the HR landscape: a leadership capability crisis with 90% of organisations reporting inadequately equipped leaders; universal change with no steady state to return to; and an AI readiness gap creating anxiety even among those actively preparing.

Methodology

The research was conducted between [dates] and involved in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 50 senior HR leaders (CHROs, HR Directors, and senior People & Culture leaders) across New Zealand. Participants represented diverse industries including professional services, technology,

financial services, manufacturing, retail, healthcare, and public sector organisations, ranging from under 500 employees to 5,000+ employee enterprises.

The research prioritises qualitative depth alongside quantitative accuracy, capturing patterns, themes, and honest reflections that emerged across the 50 conversations.

About Tomorrow's People

Tomorrow's People is New Zealand's first specialist HR technology consultancy, founded in 2017. The firm provides independent, vendor-neutral advice and support across the entire HR tech lifecycle, from strategic advisory and system selection through to implementation, integration, and ongoing optimisation.

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