

# AI for HR Has a Verdict Now: What HR Tech MENA 2026 Actually Proved

*Two days in Dubai turned a buzzword into a working theory of execution*

DUBAI , UNITED ARAB EMIRATES,  
September 18, 2026 /  
EINPresswire.com/ --

The 12th Annual HR Tech MENA Summit reverberated with applause at the Waldorf Astoria Dubai Palm Jumeirah after two days that lived up to its theme, The Era of Execution: Where AI Gets Human. What began as a conversation, amongst 400 HR and Tech Leaders from GCC, about AI adoption across the region's HR functions turned, session after session, into something closer to a working session on execution itself, how to move from ambition to measurable change without losing the human judgment that makes any of it matter.

Day One: Setting the Terms of the Debate

The summit opened under the banner "Autonomous Systems. Strategic Leaders. The Next Evolution of HR

Tech," with Arthur Carmazzi, the World's #1 Thought Leader in Organizational Culture, delivering the Opening International Keynote, "The Human Edge: Leading Change When AI Never Sleeps." His central message, that technology moves at machine speed while humans move at human speed, and that culture remains the most sustainable advantage in an automated world, set a thoughtful tone for the sessions that followed.

That thread continued into "The Bold Frontier: HR as a Driver of Strategic Advantage," where



panelists spoke openly about where AI is actually headed for the workforce. Walid Tayel, Group Chief Human Resources Officer at Elsewedy Electric, shared his view that acknowledging real workforce change builds more trust than softening the message, drawing on his own organization's experience running three simultaneous AI initiatives, from an AI-powered HR programme with more than 30 live use cases to a company-wide efficiency drive and an employee AI upskilling effort running since 2024, all aimed at unlocking, rather than replacing, human potential.



The fireside chat "From Data to Decisions: The New Era of Talent Transformation" brought that same clarity to how progress gets measured. Mustafa Jama, Former Chief Human Resources Officer at Ghassan Aboud Holding, spoke about where AI adds the most value, in execution, screening and shortlisting at scale, while judgment on culture fit and critical hires stays firmly human. He also shared how his team simplified its own reporting, narrowing dozens of possible metrics down to three that actually moved the needle: talent density, critical-role pipeline strength, and flight risk among key performers, a discipline that once gave his organization six months' notice before a significant share of its mid-level operations leadership was at risk of leaving.

The CXO panel, "Bridging the Divide: HR + IT, The Power Duo Driving Transformation," brought the conversation to a shared idea. Dr. Jassim Al Awadhi, Executive Director, Head of Enterprise Platforms at Emirates NBD, spoke about HR and IT moving beyond a customer-and-provider relationship toward becoming co-architects of the future of work, with IT bringing an understanding of systems and HR an understanding of how work actually happens, each complementing the other in building the AI-enabled enterprise.

Reflecting on the day, Carmazzi shared what stood out to him most. "The HR Tech MENA Summit was amazing... because of the quality of the speakers... they're looking for assistance and for ideas, and well, they are ready to act. So, if you want to come to a real action-based, idea-generating place, come to the HR Tech MENA Summit," he said.

## Day Two: Where the Human Side Showed Up

Day two turned the lens inward, opening under "The Human-Side of AI: Where Technology Meets Heart" with a keynote asking what makes a leader indispensable once AI can do the job itself.

The morning's panel on talent, technology, and trust across borders gave way to a case study on reinventing performance management, a keynote on the psychological levers behind AI adoption, and an Elite CAIO Panel examining what it means to govern AI when accountability is national rather than organizational. The day, and the summit, closed on a hackathon that put HR and technology leaders in the same room to build and pitch live solutions rather than simply discuss them, a fitting bookend for a summit built around execution.

## Voices From the Floor

For many delegates, the value of the two days came down to the quality of the dialogue itself. "I am pleased with the level of execution today. The height of the dialogue, the participants, in the panels and the keynotes are giving us really great insights, excellent sessions. It is one of the best events during my years in Dubai" said Marie-Louise Ek, Vice President HR Middle East & Africa, Hilton.

That sense of new partnership was echoed by Samar Samy, Regional HR Partner, Gulf Cryo, who pointed to the summit as a catalyst for her own organization's shift in ways of working: "We have the opportunity to connect to the right partners... we are transforming our whole way of working."

For sponsors, the summit was as much about the conversations on the ground as the sessions on stage. "It's important for Remote to obviously be present in these things as we're growing in the region, meet some of our customers, meet prospective customers and also understand what's going on in the market," said Karim Helbawi, Enterprise Account Executive, Remote. The quality of the conversations, especially with the delegates, have been really, really high, meeting a lot of diverse types of customers, from people who are working in retail to finance to tech," he said, summing up the experience in two words: "High-level and definitive."

Sponsors echoed the same energy. "This is the 5th edition we've partnered together, and there's much more to come. HR Tech is one of the flagship events in the MEA region that brings value for attendees and sponsors," said Kareem Salim, Head of Marketing, Coursera.

"I've been able to connect with a lot of people; it's been a pleasure. I found it a bit surprising; I didn't think it would be this many connections. I've interacted with so many businesses in the UAE and GCC. We had a lot of good conversations, and hopefully they'll lead somewhere," said Karam El Assal, Senior Account Executive, Odoo.

## Looking Ahead

"Over the past decade, this summit has evolved from a gathering into a movement, a place where the region's boldest HR leaders, technology pioneers, and changemakers come together not just to imagine the future, but to build it."— Sidh NC, Director, QnA International  
Two days, dozens of sessions, and a room full of HR and technology leaders later, the summit's closing message was less about AI itself than about what the region does with it next. The 13th Annual HR Tech MENA is already gathering a great momentum of interest as it gears up to return

in 2027 to continue the conversation, and, if this year is any indication, to keep pushing it further from theory and closer to execution.

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