The great skills race: Why one in four workers have left their jobs - HR Executive

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the growing tension between employee expectations for learning and development (L&D) and employer responsiveness in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. The author's central argument is that skill-building — particularly in AI, data, and cybersecurity — has become a decisive factor in employee retention, with workers increasingly willing to leave organizations that fail to invest in their development. Key evidence is drawn from the 2025 Randstad Workmonitor (26,000+ workers, 35 markets), which reports that 40% of workers would quit without adequate L&D opportunities and that 23% have already done so — up from 16% in 2024. Supplementary data from Coursera's Industry Skills Brief highlights a 1,158% year-over-year surge in generative AI course enrollments and an 18% rise in professional certificate uptake. The article concludes that both geographic disparities in employer support and the acceleration of AI adoption are reshaping workforce development priorities, with organizations in North America and APAC outpacing those in Southern Europe and Latin America in skills support delivery.

Key Insights

1. 40% of surveyed workers globally report willingness to leave their jobs if sufficient learning opportunities are not provided, with 23% having already done so — a significant increase from 16% in 2024.

2. Employer responsiveness to future-proofing has improved markedly: 64% of workers report receiving skills support, up from 52% the prior year, suggesting organizational awareness is translating into action.

3. Generative AI course enrollments increased 1,158% year-over-year across industries, signaling a structural shift in workforce skill demand that is outpacing traditional L&D program design.

Practical Takeaways

- Organizations in Southern Europe and Latin America show lower rates of employee-reported skills support compared to North America and APAC, indicating a geographic gap in L&D investment that may affect talent retention in those regions.

- Poor onboarding for IT and tech talent is estimated to cost U.S. organizations $2.2 billion annually, with 25% of new IT hires leaving after a negative onboarding experience — pointing to onboarding as a high-cost failure point in the employee lifecycle.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article draws on a large-scale, longitudinal survey (Randstad Workmonitor, 22nd edition, 26,000+ respondents across 35 markets), lending credibility to its core retention and L&D statistics. Year-over-year comparisons add useful trend context. Limitations: The piece aggregates data from multiple vendor-produced reports (Randstad, Coursera, Bullhorn, Nexthink, Gallup) without critically evaluating their methodologies, sampling biases, or potential conflicts of interest. Vendors publishing statistics about the value of their own service categories — such as Nexthink quantifying the cost of poor onboarding or Bullhorn reporting on digital transformation — represent inherent promotional bias. The article does not distinguish between correlation and causation in attrition-L&D relationships. The Gallup replacement cost figures (200% of salary for leaders) are cited without a source date or study reference. The article functions primarily as a news digest rather than independent analysis, limiting its analytical depth.

Organizational Practice

Organizations are described as expanding future-proofing skills support, with 64% of workers reporting receipt of such support in 2025 versus 52% the prior year. Some employers are integrating AI into workforce development programs. Onboarding practices for IT and tech talent are identified as an area of operational weakness. Citizens bank is noted as an example of an organization where the CHRO led training for more than 5,800 employees and integrated AI into workforce development.

Strategic Implications

The data points to a measurable shift in employee bargaining leverage around L&D, with retention increasingly contingent on perceived investment in skill development. The steep rise in generative AI enrollment figures suggests that workforce reskilling timelines are compressing, creating potential misalignment between traditional annual training cycles and employee expectations for continuous development. Geographic disparities in employer L&D support may influence talent mobility patterns across regions. The rising cost estimates tied to poor onboarding and leadership replacement suggest that PMS frameworks may need to encompass earlier lifecycle stages — including onboarding — to address retention risk comprehensively.

Validation Status: passed
