

## Spelman dialogues

# Technology transforms talent strategy and workforce planning

December 2024

Demographic shifts, changing norms around work-life balance, financial volatility, and artificial intelligence are just some of the forces reshaping the workplace and workforce today. When it comes to talent acquisition, retention, and development, corporate leaders are implementing novel approaches to achieve competitive success and business survival.

In partnership with Spelman College, Tapestry Networks convened [Reimagining the Future of Talent](#) to launch a multigenerational dialogue on talent issues. Held on Spelman's Atlanta campus during [National HBCU Week](#), the forum brought together leaders from over 40 organizations. Top corporate executives and board members engaged with academic leaders, faculty, and students from Spelman College, Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine, Georgetown University, and Brown University. The conversation covered topics such as the changing employee-employer relationship and the emergence of market-disrupting technologies. The group considered talent in the healthcare sector in a detailed case study.

This Tapestry Networks brief highlights the role of data and technology in reshaping the workplace, transforming skills, innovation, and decision making.<sup>1</sup>

[Technology is transforming workplace planning and talent strategy](#)

[Data is altering how companies and organizations oversee addressing their talent needs](#)

*For a list of meeting participants, see appendix (page 7).*

## Technology is transforming workforce planning and talent strategy

Summarizing the impact technology is having on jobs and hiring, one director said, *“Technology is reshaping future skills and roles, meaning the jobs of tomorrow will be vastly different from those of today.”* The rapidity of the transformation presents major challenges for workforce planning and talent management. In the context of the emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AI), for example, one director asked, *“How do you invest in talent when you don’t really know where it’s headed? How will you hire? What’s the criteria?”*

### Securing top talent to drive innovation and performance

*“It’s not about consuming technology; it’s about the ability to create and innovate with technology. We have to train young leaders to think in diverse contexts so they can effectively address and assist with the challenges faced by others,”* one executive said. Participants highlighted the ongoing competition for people who can successfully harness emerging technologies. Even if deep technology expertise is not necessary, leaders need sufficient facility with evolving technologies to grasp how to deploy them to enhance productivity and drive innovation. *“You don’t have to be the technologist, but you have to understand the technology and how to apply it. That is what is going to move us forward.”* It can be difficult to find tech-savvy leaders, especially since that is not the only trait a leader needs: *“It’s not just about having technologists, but leaders with both business acumen and technical expertise who can combine business leadership with a deep understanding of how to integrate technology into strategy and operations.”*

### Optimizing the use of data

*“Data is gold,”* said one director. Across industries, companies are relying on more and different kinds of data to inform strategy and optimize operations. *“Data is really the root of every decision that every organization makes,”* one executive said. The struggle comes in effectively using that data to drive performance. *“Every company has more data than they know what to do with, so your ability to provide insights and perspectives is going to be a critical factor in how you can help organizations be successful,”* said an executive. Regarding the relation between data and AI technologies, one executive said, *“Data is the cake and AI is the icing.”*

*“How do you invest in talent when you don’t really know where [technology is] headed? How will you hire? What’s the criteria?”*

## Using technology to augment human expertise and decision making

The world is beginning to see AI empower people to achieve new and better insights. A director shared an example of AI outpacing human expertise: *“An executive from a large healthcare system, whom I’ve worked with, battled four types of cancer. After seeing some of the best doctors in the world who gave him just a year to live, he turned to an AI model that sifted through global cancer data. The insights he discovered were so impressive that when he shared them with his primary doctor, they were amazed. He is now cancer free.”*

## Developing core competencies as technology transforms the world of work

While emerging technologies are altering the way that we work, participants strongly emphasized the need for certain evergreen skills and core competencies. Unfortunately, despite being the first digital-native generation, many Gen-Z workers lack basic skills needed for the workplace. This presents an acute challenge both for young workers and for organizations looking to hire them. One participant noted that *“40% of employers say that Gen-Z isn’t hireable, based on a lack of core skills and communication abilities. And 40% of graduates say that they don’t feel prepared to enter the workforce when they graduate.”*

Participants identified several core competencies that younger workers need to acquire if they are to thrive in today’s tech-driven workplaces.

- Problem solving and critical thinking.** One director said, *“Companies are looking for problem solvers, for people who are curious and who are thinkers and reasoners. They want to know how people think about big and small problems.”* An academic leader underscored that while comfort with technology may be important, critical thinking is even more so: *“Regardless of what the new technology is, if you understand how to think and reason about any problem, then you’re going to be OK.”* Spelman considers critical thinking foundational and educates students accordingly. One academic leader said, *“We tell our students, ‘You have to love thinking about problems and do the work to understand how to decompose this problem into smaller pieces and then identify the steps for solving the problem.’”*

*“Regardless of what the new technology is, if you understand how to think and reason about any problem, then you’re going to be OK.”*

- **Communication and connection.** In today’s hybrid and remote work environments, organizations have a deep need for employees with communication skills. A director said, *“A noticeable communication skills gap has emerged among those who began or completed school during the pandemic ... Many [of these young workers feel] isolated and lack vital socialization skills.”* Another director emphasized that *“there is nothing more important than human connection, no matter the importance of technology. No business can be successful without human connection.”*
- **Curiosity.** *“Being curious is the core of a career path. We constantly seek out thinkers—individuals eager to uncover solutions to challenges,”* said an executive. Participants agreed that curiosity provides a dynamic element to one’s career, enabling individuals to envision themselves in new roles and gain clarity about their work aspirations.
- **Domain expertise.** An academic leader said, *“With AI technology, the responses you receive to your queries often lack accuracy. While you can use the tool for various tasks, it’s essential to evaluate the accuracy and correctness of the information you obtain.”* This requires a certain level of domain expertise. For example, one of the most productivity-enhancing early use cases for generative AI is writing software code, but one participant said, *“For every ten lines of code, there’s one line of bugs,”* requiring engineers to possess the necessary expertise to spot and correct errors.

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## Data is altering how companies and organizations address their talent gaps and needs

The quantity of data available today and advances in data analytics are revolutionizing oversight of talent acquisition and retention strategies, especially around workplace equity, diversity, and inclusion. *“We’ve come a long way in the last decade. Just getting data used to be the big challenge,”* said a director. Participants identified a wide range of data that informs their oversight of talent and the assessment of progress on workplace equity and diversity issues, including data on hiring, retention, and promotion, pay data, and engagement surveys.

But simply having access to data is not enough. Participants described a number of ways to maximize the value of pertinent data.

- **Disaggregating data.** Aggregate metrics can obscure important realities, including significant disparities across groups. One executive noted that while they had *“best in class”* overall scores on employee engagement surveys, breaking scores down by underrepresented groups revealed a very different picture. The same applies to retention, promotion, and pay data. One executive said, *“You need to break down the data and ask, ‘Why were women or diverse candidates not advancing?’ [Disaggregation] even includes looking at pay equity trends to identify any discrepancies related to race or gender that need to be corrected.”* Boards are increasingly demanding this level of detailed reporting to enhance their oversight of talent strategy. One director said, *“We can slice and dice the data in so many ways, which allows the board to ask all kinds of great questions—and we do.”*
- **Analyzing trends over time.** Snapshots or point-in-time data are of limited usefulness in guiding oversight and decision making. A director said, *“It’s crucial to evaluate metrics not just at a single moment, but over time, focusing on trends and trajectories. Instead of asking how we are doing this quarter or year, we should compare progress across longer periods to develop meaningful actions. The key is not just presenting data at a single point but understanding what it reveals and how we can learn and act upon it.”*
- **Supplementing data with qualitative information.** *“Data can tell you what’s happening, but it can’t tell you why,”* said an executive. It is important to use data to identify areas where qualitative information can shed light on the nuances behind the quantitative data. For example, when attrition data showed that certain groups were leaving a company at higher rates than others, it led the organization to establish mechanisms to probe further. *“We conduct exit interviews to analyze the ‘push-pull’ factors influencing employees’ decisions to leave the company, presenting this data to the board. We also have a program that allows employees to openly discuss their challenges and reasons for considering leaving. Together, we work to find solutions to address their concerns.”*

*“Data can tell you what’s happening, but it can’t tell you why.”*

Data has no value unless it drives accountability and decision making. One director said, *“All the data we have is great, but the next step is what do we do with that data.”* Another director agreed: *“It’s not just about the data presented on the page; it’s about what lies beyond it. What actions are being taken based on this data? We need to consider the direction it takes and the actions that arise from it.”*

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As technology reshapes the workforce, corporate leaders are rethinking talent strategy to ensure business resilience. This shift goes beyond the development of technical skills; it requires cultivating leaders who can integrate digital expertise with critical thinking, adaptability, and strategic vision. By prioritizing core human competencies and fostering a culture of curiosity and innovation, companies enable their people to harness data and technology in ways that drive meaningful business outcomes. Integrating data and technological insight into talent strategy will position organizations to adapt and thrive in an increasingly complex talent landscape.



[Tapestry Networks](#) brings world-class leaders together to tackle complex challenges and promote positive change through the power of connected thinking.



[Spelman College](#), a global leader in the education of women of African descent, is dedicated to academic excellence in the liberal arts and sciences and the intellectual, creative, ethical and leadership development of its students. For 18 years, Spelman has been number 1 in the *US News and World Report* ranking of historically Black colleges and universities. Its 2,100 students come from 43 US states and 11 countries.

**Media Relations Contact:**

Amy Christenson, Tapestry Networks Managing Director, Operations  
[achristenson@tapestrynets.com](mailto:achristenson@tapestrynets.com)



## Appendix: Participants

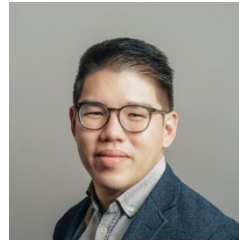
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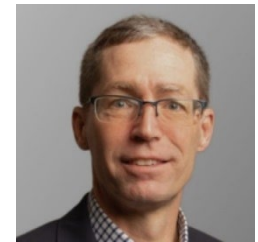
Noni Abdur-Razzaq  
Associate  
Tapestry Networks



LaShonda Anderson-Williams  
Chief Customer and Commercial Officer, Salesforce Industries  
Salesforce  
Non-Executive Director  
Digimarc



Joel Ang  
Senior Associate  
Tapestry Networks



Eric Baldwin  
Executive Director  
Tapestry Networks



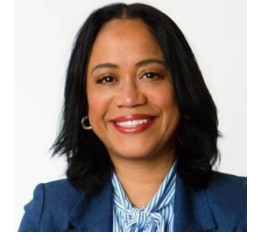
Michael Bender  
Independent Chair  
Kohl's  
Non-Executive Director  
Acuity Brands



Kathy Bremer  
Managing Director  
BoardWalk Consulting



Eric Broyles  
Founder and Chief Executive Officer  
Nanocan Therapeutics Corporation



Roslyn Byrd  
National Portfolio Sales Director and DEI Executive Sponsor  
LHH Recruitment Solutions



Beth Cameron  
Senior Adviser for Global Health Security  
USAID  
Senior Adviser  
Pandemic Center at the Brown University School of Public Health



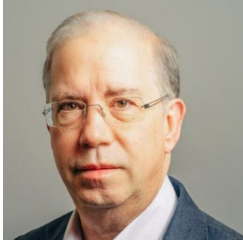
Laurie Chamberlin  
President  
LHH Recruitment Solutions  
Non-Executive Director  
Adecco Group US  
Foundation



Amy Christenson  
Managing Director, Operations  
Tapestry Networks



James Cole, Jr.  
Founder and Chief Executive Officer  
The Jasco Group  
Non-Executive Director  
AIG



Jonathan Day  
Chief Executive  
Tapestry Networks



Marsha Ershaghi  
Managing Director  
Tapestry Networks



Gabrielle Evans  
Healthy Equity Scholar  
Brown University School of  
Public Health



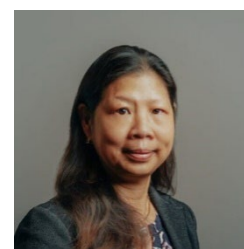
Helene Gayle  
President  
Spelman College  
Non-Executive Director  
The Coca-Cola Company,  
Palo Alto Networks, and  
Organon



Camille Chang Gilmore  
Vice President, Human  
Resources and Global  
Chief Diversity, Equity, and  
Inclusion Officer  
Boston Scientific  
Non-Executive Director  
WittKieffer



Deryk Gilmore  
President, Chief  
Executive Officer, Agent  
Day 1 Sports +  
Entertainment  
Management



Lindee Goh  
Managing Director  
Tapestry Networks



Rosalind Gregory-Bass  
Associate Professor and  
Director of the Health  
Careers Program  
Spelman College



Lamont Hames  
Founder, President, and  
Chief Executive Officer  
LMH Strategies, Inc.



Bridgette Heller  
Cofounder and Chief  
Executive Officer  
Shirley Proctor Puller  
Foundation  
Non-Executive Director  
Aramark, Dexcom, Integral  
Ad Science, Newman's  
Own, and Novartis AG



Latonda Henderson  
Chief Diversity, Equity,  
and Inclusion Officer  
AMB Sports +  
Entertainment

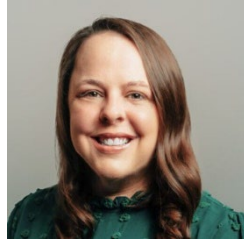


Raquel Hill  
Professor and Chair,  
Computer and Information  
Sciences Department  
Spelman College





Darryl Holloman  
Vice President for Student  
Affairs  
Spelman College



Laura Koski  
Project and Event Manger  
Tapestry Networks



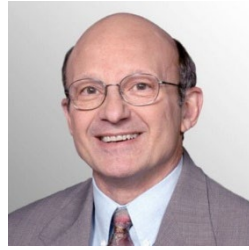
Hal Kravitz  
Lead Independent Director  
Celsius



Karen Mattimore  
Senior Vice President and  
Chief Human Resources  
Officer  
Honeywell



Kimberly Lee Minor  
Chief Executive Officer  
Women of Color Retail  
Alliance (WOCRA)



Bill Novelli  
Professor  
McDonough School of  
Business, Georgetown  
University



Bea Perez  
Executive Vice President  
and Global Chief  
Communications,  
Sustainability & Strategic  
Partnerships Officer  
The Coca-Cola Company  
Non-Executive Director  
Primerica and WW  
Grainger



Paula Price  
Non-Executive Director  
Accenture, Bristol-Meyers  
Squibb, Mondelēz  
International, and Warner  
Bros. Discovery



Valerie Montgomery Rice  
President and Chief  
Executive Officer  
Morehouse School of  
Medicine



Sonya Rush  
Director, Spelpreneur  
Spelman College



Pamela Scott-Johnson  
Provost and Vice President  
of Academic Affairs  
Spelman College



Rachel Spivey  
Director of Retention and  
Progression (Stay and  
Thrive) Team  
Google



Mari Steinmetz  
Chief People Officer  
Kohl's



Rukiya Thomas  
Culture + Social Impact  
Executive Lead  
AtkinsRéalis



Denise Ward  
Associate Vice President  
for Communications and  
Marketing  
Spelman College



Grant Warner  
Bank of America Endowed  
Professor of  
Entrepreneurship  
Spelman College  
Director  
Center for Black  
Entrepreneurship



Cortney Woodruff  
Cofounder and Chief  
Executive Officer  
Assemble.FYI



Donna Zarcone  
Non-Executive Director  
CDW and Cigna

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This brief reflects the network's use of a modified version of the Chatham House Rule whereby names of participants and their affiliations are a matter of public record, but comments are not attributed to individuals or organizations.