

SAUDI ARABIA

WORKFORCE 2026

KORN FERRY

Preface



Jonathan Holmes
Managing Director, Middle East, Turkey and Africa (META). Korn Ferry

When I speak with leaders across the Kingdom, from Riyadh to the Eastern Province, I hear a consistent message: change is no longer something on the horizon, it is already here.

Organizations are rethinking how they attract talent, how they build capability, and how they prepare for a future shaped by AI, economic diversification, and the evolving expectations of a new generation of employees.

What stands out is the sense of momentum. Vision 2030 is not just a national strategy; it is actively reshaping how work is designed, how careers are built, and how value is created inside organizations.

Read what follows as a map. The signals are good. The heading is clear. The work now is to steer toward it.

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In a world shaped by rapid technological change and evolving workforce expectations, our Workforce Report examines what's defining the employee experience today, from AI in the workplace and the drivers of attraction and retention, to workload, wellbeing, growth, and learning.

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AI in the *Workplace*

What the workforce is telling us about AI

Examining how employees perceive AI through organizational fluency, excitement and anxiety, the impact on daily work and productivity, and the changing nature of roles.



Kam Malik
Senior Client Partner. Korn Ferry

"AI fluency is no longer confined to technical teams. It's becoming a baseline expectation across every role, and organizations that treat it as optional will spend the next few years catching up."



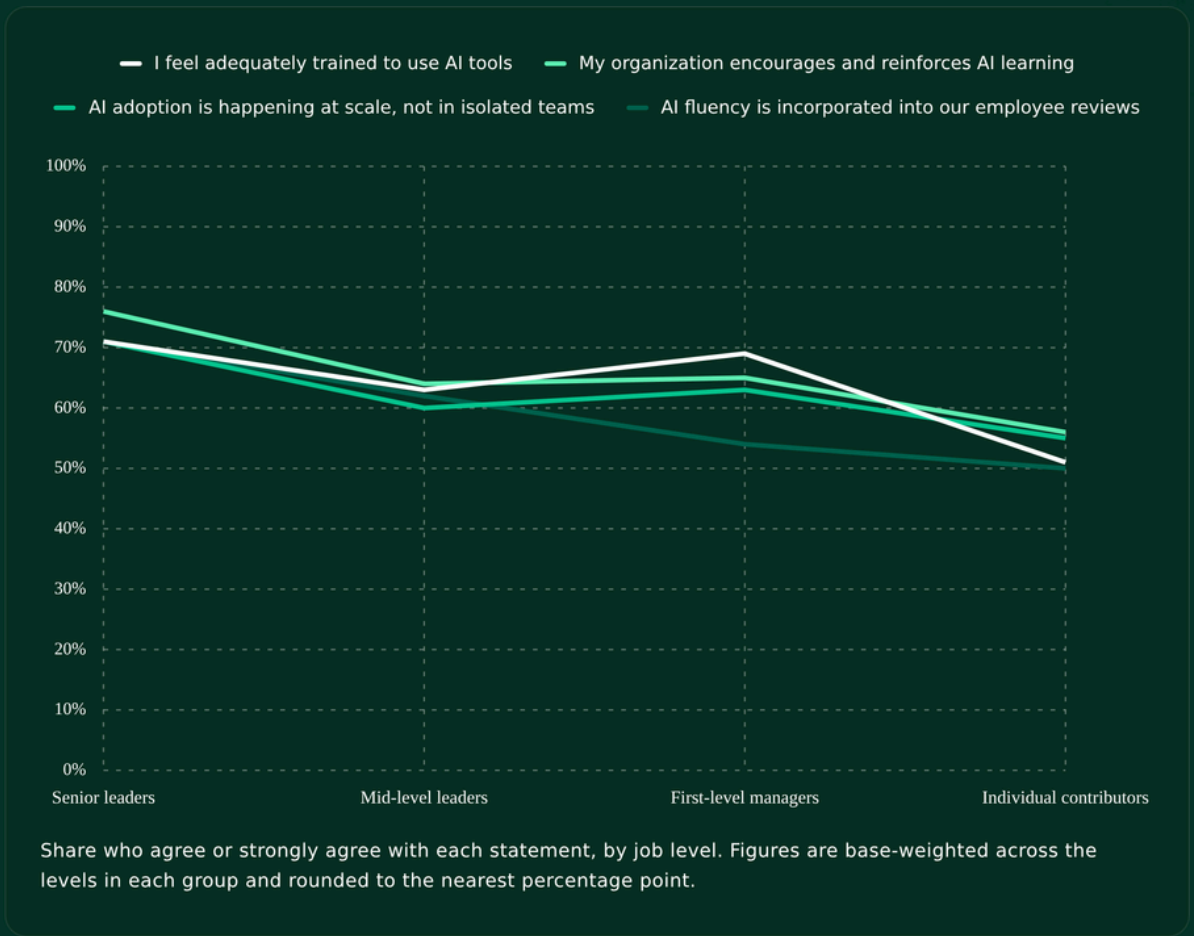
Organizational AI Fluency

Organizational AI fluency is the collective capability of a workforce to understand, apply, and adapt to AI tools as part of everyday work. It determines whether AI becomes a scalable capability that improves performance, or remains a set of isolated tools used by a few teams.

Executives, managers, and frontline employees experience AI differently. Leaders set the direction, managers translate it into processes, and employees execute it in real workflows, so gaps between levels reveal where adoption is breaking down.

In Saudi Arabia, AI fluency appears more advanced at the leadership level but still shows clear drop-off at the frontline. **While 71% of senior leaders feel adequately trained, this drops to just 51% among individual contributors**. Reinforcement is relatively stronger at the top: 76% of senior leaders say AI learning is encouraged, falling to 56% at the individual contributor level. Adoption peaks at 71% among senior leaders but drops to 55% at the frontline, and only 49% of individual contributors say they are assessed on AI fluency.

Overall, the data suggests Saudi organizations are further along in leadership alignment, but still face a significant gap in embedding AI into frontline workflows and performance systems.



Share who agree or strongly agree with each statement, by job level. Figures are base-weighted across the levels in each group and rounded to the nearest percentage point.

Excitement Leads Anxiety Sits Beneath it

81% of the KSA workforce feel excited about AI's potential, against 65% globally. Yet fear of job replacement runs high alongside it: 54% believe their role could be replaced within three years, ten points above the global average.

Concern peaks among mid-level leaders at 60%, while frontline staff pair one-in-two anxiety with the lowest fluency: just 51% feel adequately trained. That combination of high fear and thinner capability at the frontline creates the conditions for resistance, not adoption.

AI is adding work before it relieves it, and paying off anyway. 64% say AI tools have increased the number of tasks expected in their role. Yet simultaneously, 78% report increased efficiency, among the highest of any market. In KSA, 74% feel they have more opportunity to innovate today.

81%

of the KSA workforce feel excited and positive about how AI will change the way they work

78%

say AI has increased their efficiency when asked to use it

64%

say AI has increased the number of tasks expected in their role



"Excitement about AI running higher here than in the West is a real lever, but only if organizations use it. That means reinforcing learning and development across the board, not just at the top, and reimagining roles rather than bolting AI onto old ones. Do that, and adoption accelerates because people buy in, not because they're told to."

Danny Leinders
Head of Executive Search, Middle East & North Africa, Korn Ferry

What the workforce is telling us	KSA vs Global		Job levels in KSA			
	KSA	Global	Senior leaders	Mid-level leaders	First-level managers	Individual contributors
FEAR the anxiety beneath the enthusiasm						
I feel certain my role will be replaced by AI/tech in the next three years	54%	44%	54%	60%	52%	50%
AI tools have increased the number of tasks expected in my role	64%	52%	74%	60%	63%	55%
EXCITEMENT sentiment leads the transition						
I feel excited and positive about how AI will change the way I work	81%	65%	81%	84%	81%	78%
Using AI in my role will bolster my value in the next three years	70%	58%	78%	67%	70%	63%
ORGANIZATIONAL FLUENCY is the organization built to use AI?						
I feel adequately trained to use AI tools	65%	52%	71%	63%	69%	51%
Leaders in my organization understand AI and how to use it	67%	56%	80%	66%	63%	54%
My organization encourages and reinforces AI learning and development	66%	55%	76%	64%	65%	56%
AI adoption is happening at scale, not just in isolated teams	63%	54%	71%	60%	63%	55%
AI tools are integrated into how work gets done in my role	65%	54%	73%	59%	64%	60%
I am assessed on my level of AI fluency	59%	47%	74%	53%	55%	49%
AI fluency is incorporated into our employee reviews	60%	50%	71%	62%	54%	50%
IMPACT AT WORK where AI is in use, it is paying off						
When asked to use AI, I found it increased my efficiency	78%	63%	82%	80%	78%	71%
AI tools allow me to focus on more high-value work	73%	60%	76%	75%	75%	66%
AI or new technologies are enabling me to innovate at work	74%	61%	77%	74%	75%	69%
AI has enabled me to have a larger hand in (re)imagining my role	66%	54%	72%	67%	69%	53%

Lower agreement — Higher agreement

Share who agree or strongly agree with each statement. KSA and Global columns compare regions; level columns break out the KSA sample.

Role Design Innovation and Productivity

If the first part of the KSA insights measures appetite for AI, this part measures whether the organization is built to use it.

Agreement that one's role has been redesigned for human-AI collaboration reaches 61%, and 75% say they are more productive than twelve months ago.

A strong focus on driving efficiencies can become a challenge for organizations when it comes at the expense of innovation and value creation. While optimizing existing processes can improve productivity, an overemphasis on efficiency may limit employees' ability to explore new ideas, experiment, and identify new opportunities for growth. Rigid processes and structures can slow decision-making, reduce agility, and make employees feel constrained in their ability to perform at their best.

Over time, organizations risk becoming focused on improving the current way of working rather than adapting to changing market demands, embracing new technologies, or creating new sources of value. A balance between operational excellence and innovation is essential to ensure organizations remain competitive and future-ready.

Here, the friction signals stand at 75% for the efficiency-first focus and 63% for feeling held back by processes and structures. The same numbers can be read two ways about the culture: as a sign of discipline and operational rigor, or as a sign that structure leaves too little room to experiment. Which reading is true in your organization is worth asking directly.



Share of Saudi Arabia employees who agree or strongly agree with each statement, ranked. Rows tagged FRICTION SIGNAL are statements where higher agreement indicates organizational friction rather than progress.
Source: Korn Ferry Global Workforce Survey 2026 (Saudi Arabia edition, n=500). Figures show the share who agree or strongly agree.

In Saudi Arabia, sentiment toward AI is consistently more positive than the global benchmark, with strong signals of growing capability and integration. Much of that momentum is still in the pilot stage across the region, with so much piloting underway in the GCC according to our **GCC AI Adoption Report 2026**.

Employees in KSA are more likely to feel excited about how AI will reshape their work and report higher levels of training, fluency recognition, and leadership understanding. This indicates that AI is not only being adopted at a tools level, but is increasingly embedded in performance expectations, learning systems, and day-to-day workflows. Importantly, employees also see tangible value in AI, citing improved efficiency, higher-value work focus, and stronger innovation outcomes.



George Karam
Managing Director, Middle East & North Africa, Korn Ferry

"In my decades advising leaders across this region, the change we're witnessing right now is unprecedented. The organizations that come out ahead will be the ones who genuinely reimagine AI and human partnership, not the ones who simply adopt the technology."



How AI-Ready is your Organization?

You're spending millions on AI. You're testing tools, launching experiments, and running pilots—but still can't see any ROI.
That's because technology on its own won't deliver the return you're hoping for.

You need leaders who can guide AI transformation, people with the skills to use AI well, and a culture where teams have room to experiment.

Get those elements right, and you create what neither people nor AI can do alone.
People bring judgment and creativity. AI brings speed and scale. Together, they create value in ways that weren't possible before.
Is your organization set up for AI success?

Get those elements right, and you create what neither people nor AI can do alone.
People bring judgment and creativity. AI brings speed and scale. Together, they create value in ways that weren't possible before.
Is your organization set up for AI success?

Answer 22 questions to receive an instant readiness profile across eight dimensions and identify the Human Capital Levers that deserve the most focused attention.

Assess Your AI Readiness



Attraction and Retention *Drivers*

What the workforce is telling us about attraction and retention

Looking at intention to leave and the specific drivers most likely to prompt a departure, alongside the gap between what attracts talent to an organization and what keeps it there, from compensation and advancement to trust in leadership and flexibility.



"Workforce expectations move fast, and in a market as competitive as the UAE, organizations that don't keep pace with them will lose people long before they lose ground on anything else."

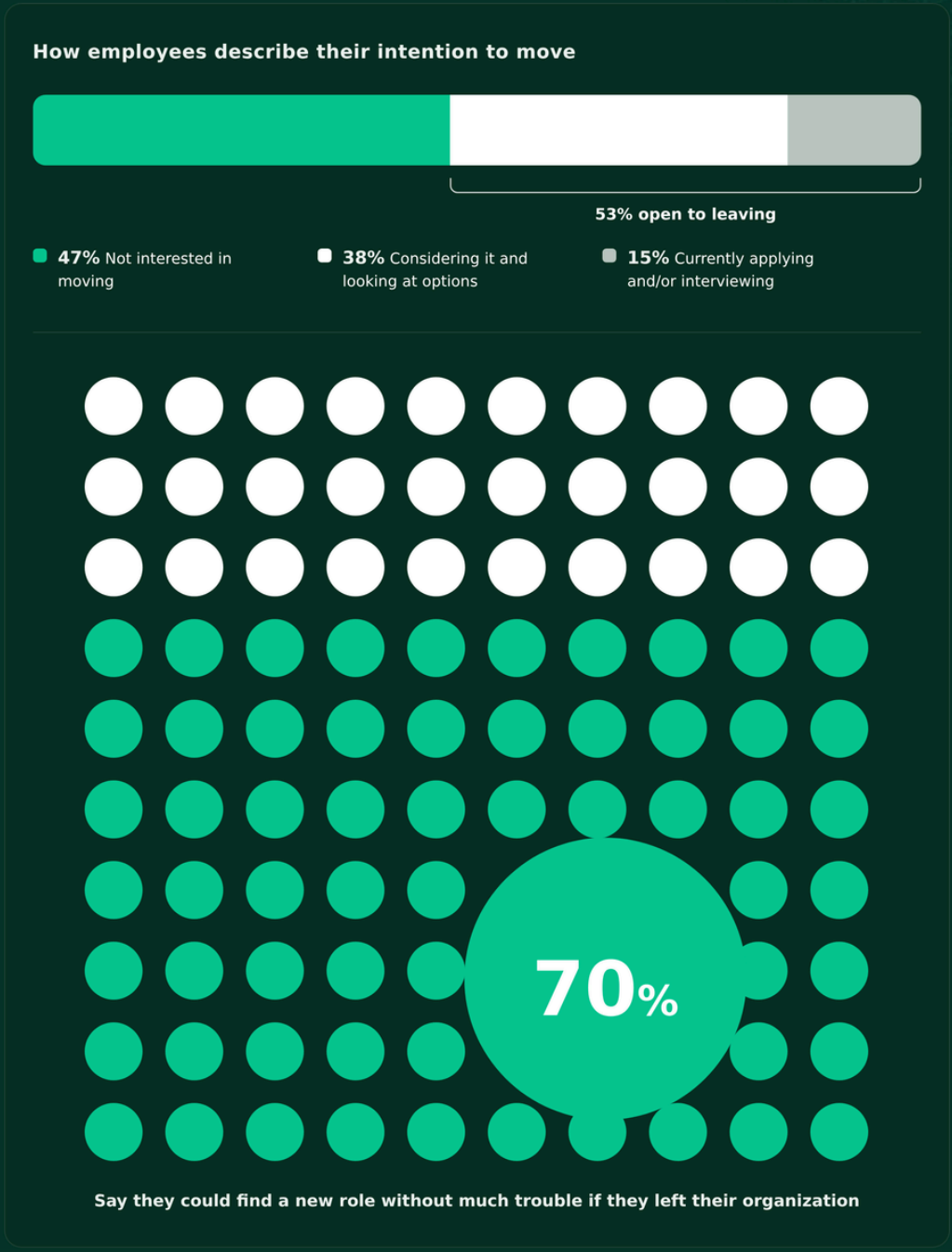
Vijay Gandhi
Regional Director, Korn Ferry Digital, EMEA, Korn Ferry



Intention to Leave

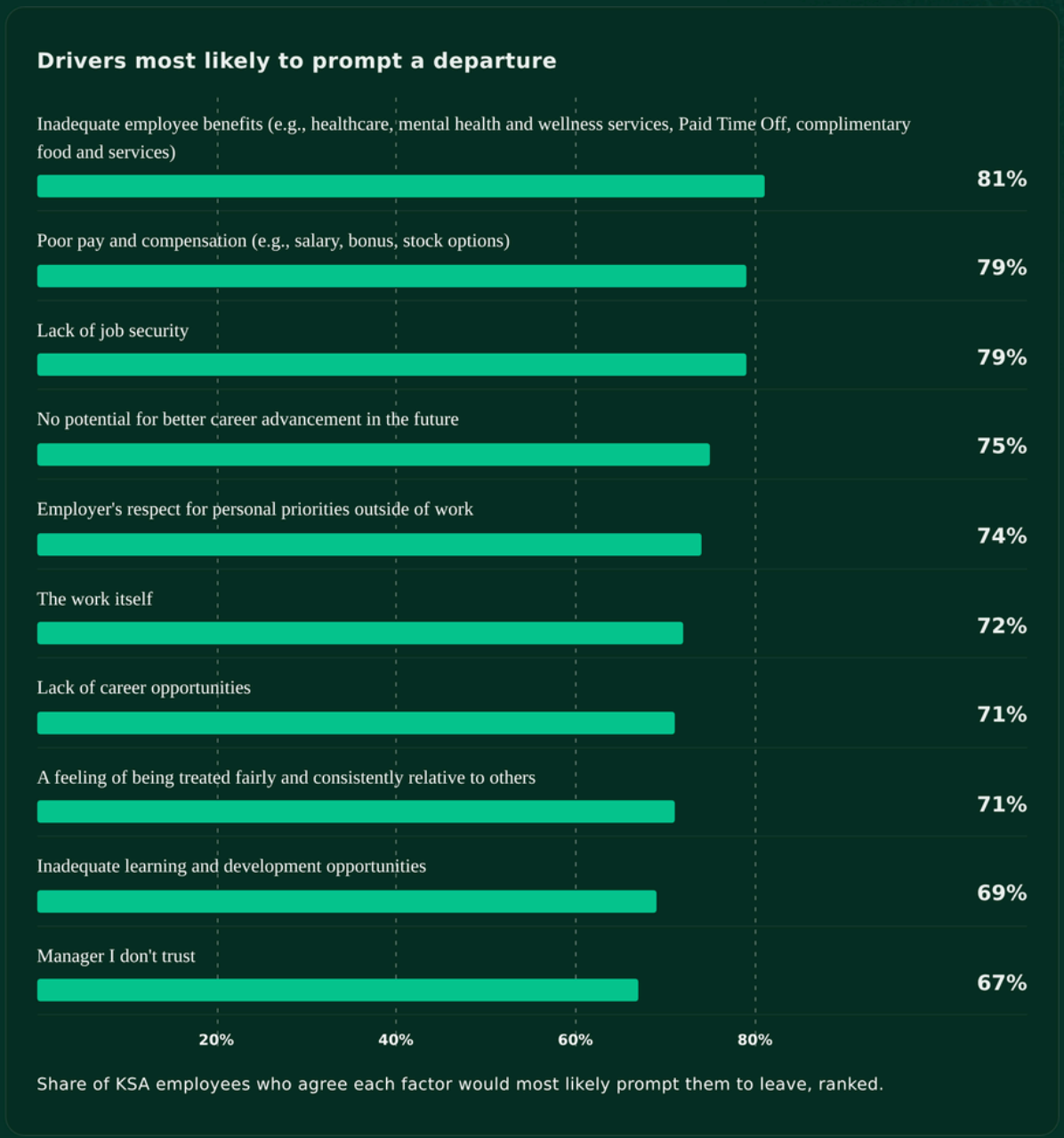
Engagement matters because it shapes whether people stay. In KSA, 47% of the workforce say they have no interest in moving. The rest are, to different degrees, in play: 38% are weighing their options and 15% are already applying or interviewing. Taken together, 53% are open to leaving. That openness is backed by confidence: 70% say they could find a new role without much trouble if they left.

For organizations, that combination is the signal to act on: nearly half the workforce is already open to leaving, and most believe they wouldn't struggle to find something else. Retention can no longer lean on inertia or a lack of alternatives, it has to be earned directly, through the parts of the employment relationship the organization actually controls.



What Would Most Likely Prompt a Departure

The leading drivers in KSA are inadequate employee benefits (81%), poor pay and compensation (79%) and lack of job security (79%). Pay sits near the top of the list, as it does in most markets; but the presence of culture- and leadership-related items high in the ranking connects the retention risk directly to the organization-side erosion in engagement.



What Attracts and Retains Talent

We asked the workforce in Saudi Arabia two direct questions: which factors would most attract them to a new role, and which factors would most persuade them to stay with their current organization.

The answers came back as two rankings, displayed side by side. Pay, and benefits dominate the top of both lists, but from there the orders diverge, and what draws people in is not always what keeps them.

What attracts talent to a new role		What persuades talent to stay	
01	Pay and compensation	Employee benefits	01
02	Employee benefits	Pay and compensation	02
03	Potential for better advancement	Job security	03
04	Career advancement	Fair and consistent treatment	04
05	Job security	Respect for personal priorities	05
06	Learning and development	The work itself	06
07	The work itself	Hiring manager I trust	07
08	Fair and consistent treatment	Flexible work hours	08
09	Flexible work hours	Potential for better advancement	09
10	Respect for personal priorities	Workplace flexibility	10

Each column ranks the factors by the share of KSA employees selecting them, from most selected to least.



"What brings someone in the door and what keeps them there are rarely the same thing. Treating them as one strategy is where a lot of organizations lose people."

Iktimal Daneshvar
Managing Director, RPO EMEA, Korn Ferry

Workload and *Wellbeing*

What the workforce is telling us about workload and wellbeing

Examining how employees experience rising workload through the signals that support them and the signals that strain them, from role expansion and exhaustion to confidence and the pace of organizational change.

71% say their workload has increased significantly over two years, **63%** feel exhausted by the pace of organizational change, and **51%** report struggling with imposter syndrome. Wellbeing is the one measure where KSA sits below the global benchmark.

71%

feel their workload has increased significantly over two years



Strain outweighs support	KSA vs Global		Job levels in KSA			
	KSA	Global	Senior leaders	Mid-level leaders	First-level managers	Individual contributors
SUPPORT SIGNALS what steadies the workforce						
I have clear priorities in my role	75%	69%	79%	73%	73%	73%
I am appropriately rewarded for additional roles I have taken on	68%	58%	73%	67%	68%	60%
Leaders in my organization clearly explain the reasons behind organizational changes	66%	60%	79%	64%	57%	64%
My organization's leaders value people over profits	63%	55%	73%	62%	63%	51%
STRAIN SIGNALS where the pressure is building						
My workload has increased significantly in the last two years	71%	62%	73%	72%	72%	65%
I feel I am performing the responsibilities of more than one role	69%	61%	73%	71%	63%	68%
AI tools have increased the number of tasks expected in my role	64%	52%	74%	60%	63%	55%
I feel exhausted by the pace of change at my organization	63%	49%	60%	66%	63%	61%
My workload negatively affects my wellbeing	60%	47%	64%	58%	60%	56%
I am too busy to deliver meaningful results	58%	45%	62%	56%	61%	49%
I am stretched too far beyond my capabilities at work	56%	44%	58%	57%	56%	52%
I frequently doubt my ability to fulfil my work responsibilities	55%	41%	58%	58%	53%	50%
I struggle with imposter syndrome (persistent self-doubt that success is deserved or has been legitimately achieved)	51%	42%	47%	49%	58%	48%

Lower agreement — Higher agreement

Share who agree or strongly agree with each statement. For strain signals, higher agreement indicates greater pressure on the workforce.

Growth and *Learning*

What the workforce is telling us about growth and learning

Examining how confident employees feel that their skills will stay relevant, whether they know what to learn next to advance, and how that confidence compares with the rest of the world.



Husain Jabir
META Growth Leader, Korn Ferry Digital
Korn Ferry

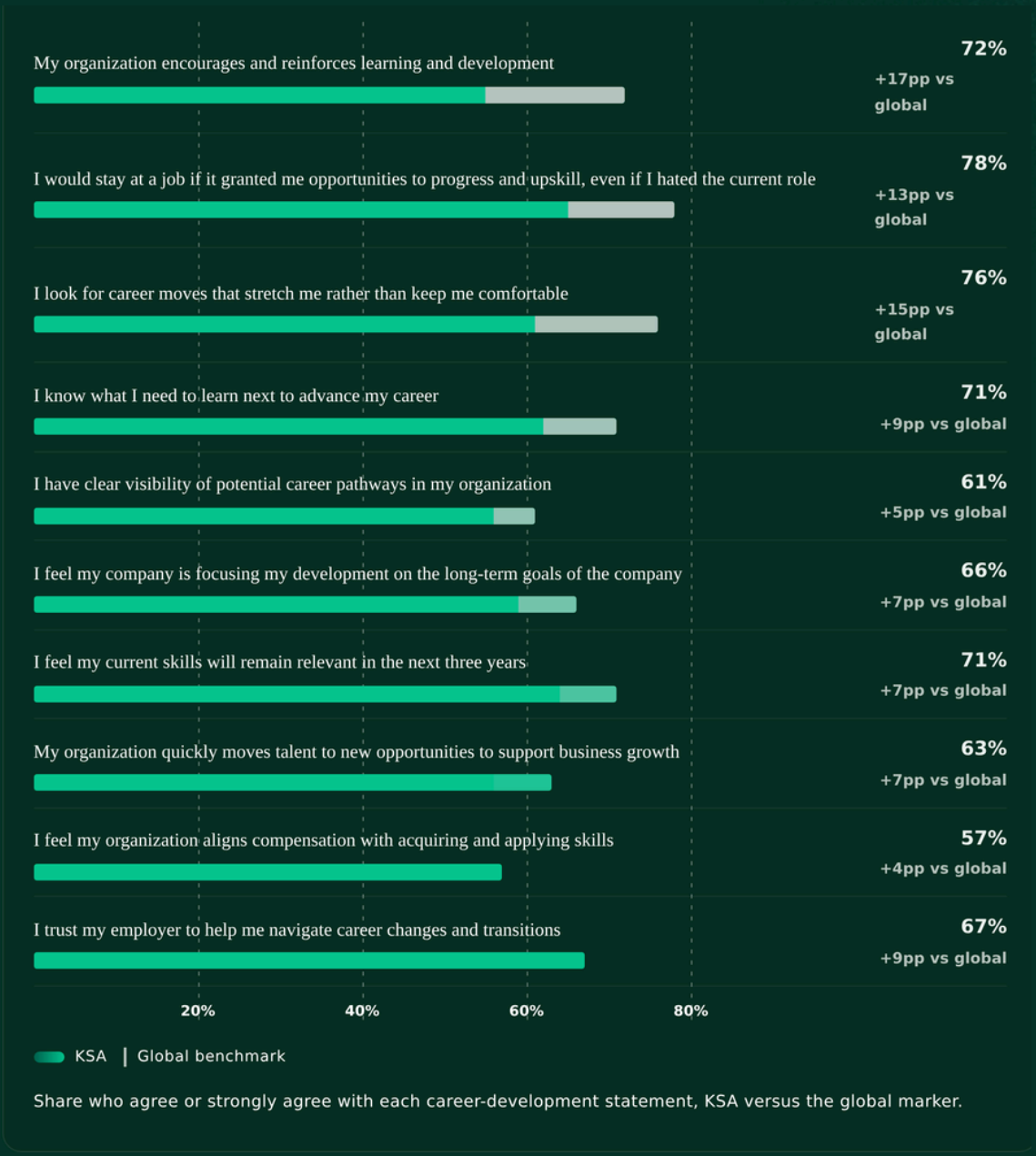
"Upskilling and reskilling can't be treated as a one-time initiative. The organizations that take it seriously, continuously, are the ones that stay ready for whatever comes next, instead of scrambling to catch up when it arrives."



Careers, Skills and Development

71% of employees in Saudi Arabia know what they need to learn next to advance.

The constraint is visibility and trust in the employer's role: agreement that the organization quickly moves talent to new opportunities, and that there are clear career pathways, sits lower.



Share who agree or strongly agree with each career-development statement, KSA versus the global marker.

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Korn Ferry is a global consulting firm that powers performance. We unlock the potential in your people and unleash transformation across your business—synchronizing strategy, operations, and talent to accelerate performance, fuel growth, and inspire a legacy of change. That's why the world's most forward-thinking companies across every major industry turn to us—for a shared commitment to lasting impact and the bold ambition to Be More Than.

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Career makers.

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