

The Global Talent Shock

Background

In 2022, your organisation carried out its regular review of workforce strategy. The mood was confident. Yes, recruitment costs were edging up in some markets, mobility programmes were becoming more complex, and digital infrastructure required ongoing investment. But none of these issues seemed pressing enough to trigger a rethink. The talent pipelines looked steady, and long-standing assumptions about mobility, career progression, and development felt secure.

By 2025, that confidence has dissolved. A series of unexpected developments has converged to create what is now being described as the Global Talent Shock.

- Governments across Asia and Europe have imposed sudden restrictions on skilled worker visas, leaving global assignments stalled and long-planned projects disrupted.
- A breakthrough in artificial intelligence has automated whole layers of mid-management work. Career pathways that once formed the backbone of professional development have been destabilised, leaving organisations struggling to rethink succession and leadership pipelines.
- At the same time, a cultural shift has taken hold. Younger employees, weary of disruption and increasingly committed to stability and community, are turning away from international postings. The global mobility programmes that were once a badge of ambition are now viewed with scepticism, even resistance.

The combined effect has been dramatic. Projects dependent on cross-border collaboration have slowed or stopped altogether. Career structures have fractured, leaving employees unsure about their futures and leaders unsure about how to motivate or retain them. Long-standing assumptions about how and where organisations source, develop, and engage talent no longer hold.

Workshop Task: Building Anticipatory Foresight

Your goal in this exercise is to move beyond risk registers and probability estimates and instead build anticipatory foresight: the ability to imagine, rehearse, and prepare for multiple plausible futures. You will do this using stakeholder-driven scenario planning.

Please follow these steps:

Step 1: Map Critical Drivers (10 minutes)

Now, step back and ask: *What forces could shape how this problem evolves?*

1. Identify the critical drivers; these may include political, economic, technological, social, environmental, or cultural factors.
2. Place them on the “Uncertainty vs. Uncontrollability” matrix to determine which are both highly uncertain and outside your control (in influencing the problem statement).
3. These drivers will provide the raw material for your scenarios.

Step 2: Build the Polarity Map & Visualise Scenarios (15 minutes)

- Choose the two most uncertain and uncontrollable drivers.
- Place them on the X and Y axes of a polarity map, each with two opposing but plausible extremes.
- This will create four quadrants, each representing a different future world.
- For each quadrant:
 - Give the scenario a memorable name.
 - Describe the world of work in this future.
 - Map how **stakeholders behave and interact** in this scenario (who gains, who loses, who resists, who collaborates).
 - Note the strategic implications of the scenario.

Outcome

By the end of the exercise, your group will have:

- A stakeholder-grounded understanding of the talent challenge.
- A problem statement that is sharp, compelling, and actionable.
- A map of the most volatile drivers shaping the future.
- Four plausible scenarios that expand your strategic imagination.

The value of this exercise lies not in predicting the future, but in rehearsing it. Prediction implies certainty, suggesting that with the right data and models, we can accurately determine what comes next. But in today’s volatile environment, certainty is a luxury no leader truly has. Scenario planning shifts the emphasis from *being right* to *being ready*.

By working with scenarios, you engage in a kind of strategic rehearsal. Just as athletes train for multiple conditions, or pilots run simulations for unlikely emergencies, leaders

rehearse different ways the future might unfold. This rehearsal helps you spot blind spots, test your assumptions, and uncover options you might otherwise miss.

Scenarios also bring stakeholder tensions to the surface. They show how conflicting interests, shifting power, and competing expectations could play out under different conditions. They allow you to see not just the forces that act on your organisation, but the ways in which stakeholders might enable, resist, or reshape your strategy.

Most importantly, scenarios make the unthinkable thinkable. They expand your field of vision beyond what seems most likely today, helping you explore futures that are less probable but highly consequential. They remind you that strategy is not just about extrapolating trends; it is about preparing for discontinuities, surprises, and contradictions.

When you rehearse these divergent futures, you equip yourself to make decisions that are more robust across multiple worlds. You begin to see which strategic moves are resilient no matter what happens, which ones would need to adapt, and which ones might be dangerous blind spots. In this way, plausibility-based scenario planning becomes less about speculation and more about cultivating foresight: a disciplined way of preparing today for the futures you cannot control but must be ready to navigate.