



October 2024

IRI Quarterly Trends Analyzer



INNOVATION RESEARCH
INTERCHANGE

Accelerating Value Creation

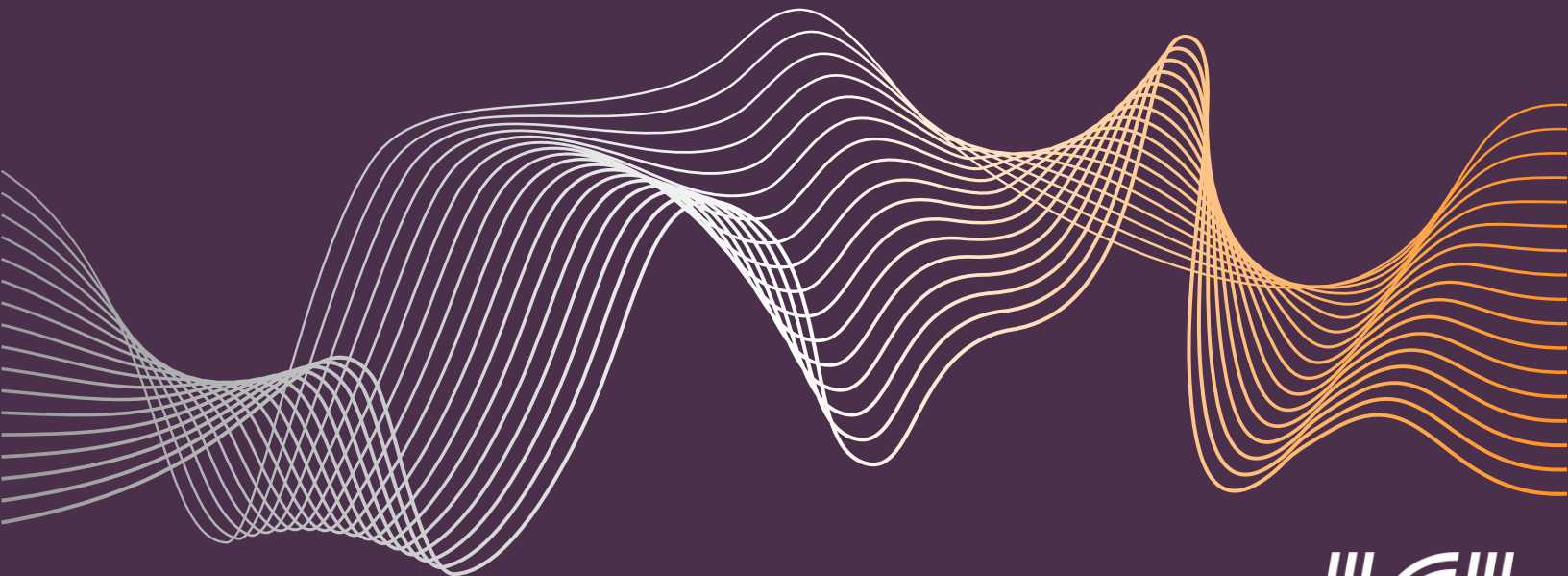
The IRI Quarterly Trends Analyzer examines the strategic environment in which innovation and R&D take place and flags up potential trends that you should factor into your strategic planning. At the end of each quarter, potential trends are examined by the IRI Foresights Advisory Board and assessed for their potential impact on innovation. In this report, key trends are described and vital questions you should ask yourself as you conduct your strategic planning are listed. In addition, we include some interesting possibilities ('weak signals') at the end of the report that we will keep an eye on to see if they will rise to the level of an impactful trend.

Innovation Research Interchange (formerly the Industrial Research Institute) is an inclusive membership organization with hundreds of global members in private-sector companies and federally funded laboratories. Founded in 1938, we lead and advance the field of innovation management by creating contemporary practices. Some of the world's most widely adopted models – such as “open innovation”, “front end of innovation”, and “stage-gate” – were born from the work of our members. We value strength in cooperation and partner with other organizations at the forefront of developments in innovation management, creating a hub for all to convene and contribute in an experimental, noncompetitive, and noncommercial environment. The IRI is a division of the National Association of Manufacturers.



October 2024 Trends

- 01 — **The challenges women and caregivers face take center stage**
- 02 — **Humans vs machines?**
- 03 — **Have office workers had enough?**



The challenges women and caregivers face take center stage



01. Description

Many women are facing the trifecta of gender-based workforce challenges, caregiving challenges, and the continuously shifting workplace challenges that have been the hallmark of the post-covid era. Caregivers, in particular, are increasingly in the spotlight. Following the Surgeon General's report labeling parenting stress as a public health hazard, issues like access to childcare, parental leave, and workplace equity are likely to gain prominence in policy debates. As Boomers move out of the workforce (and need increased care themselves) and with a newly energized labor movement, the opportunities for change may increase. Given the gridlock in the US government, the onus for that change is likely to fall on businesses. In this evolving landscape, companies that proactively enhance their support systems for working caregivers—including flexible work arrangements, robust parental leave, and affordable childcare options—may find themselves better positioned to attract and retain top talent.





02. Learn more

- [Nationwide Children's Hospital Best Employer in America for Women](#) (*Forbes*)
- [Why the Gender Pay Gap Has Barely Budged in Decades According to New Research](#) (CNBC)
- [Child Care Costs Challenge Women's Gains in Workforce](#) (*The New York Times*)
- [US Surgeon General Issues Advisory on the Mental Health and Well-Being of Parents](#) (US Department of Health and Human Services)
- ["Why Inclusion Matters" GM's Stephanie Thompson on STEM, Women in Manufacturing](#) (The Manufacturing Institute)



03. Ask yourself these questions:

- Are there opportunities for introducing more flexible work patterns, such as shorter shifts, job sharing, or hybrid roles that can help women, especially caregivers, stay in the workforce?
- Should we anticipate unions advocating for changes to shift patterns, especially for female workers and caregivers? How can we proactively engage with unions on these issues?
- What childcare options are available in the communities in which we operate? How can we get creative to support more and better options?
- How can we support employees who are balancing both childcare and eldercare? What additional benefits or policies would make our company more appealing to these workers?
- Can we reimagine job roles, career progression paths, or workplace policies to ensure inclusivity for women and other caregivers, without slowing down their career progression?
- Are we prepared for a potential talent shortage, especially in skilled positions, if caregiving responsibilities increasingly force women and other caregivers to exit the workforce?



Humans vs machines?



01. Description

Recent union actions, such as the longshoremen's East Coast strike and the Hollywood writer's strike, have brought AI and automation concerns to the forefront. Workers are protesting the potential increased use of AI and automation, fearing job losses and demanding protection. Additionally, knowledge workers are being told repeatedly that technology won't take over their jobs, but people who understand how to effectively use that technology will. Companies and workers appear to be barreling toward an inflection point at which decisions will need to be made about the role of and interplay between people and technology. As technology advances, humans will need to advance too, but what does that look like in practice? What unique value does each bring to the workforce?



02. Learn more

- [Writers Went on Strike to Protect Their Livelihoods from AI](#) (Brookings Institute)
- [A Tech Firm Stole Our Voices then Cloned and Sold Them](#) (BBC News)
- [AT&T Strike Stretches into 3rd Week in Southeast](#) (*The Wall Street Journal*)
- [Union Workers Give a Voice Over How AI Affects Their Jobs](#) (Report on American Progress)
- [Port Workers Strike on East and Gulf Coasts](#) (*The New York Times*)
- [Port Strike Freezes Shipping on East Coast Dealing Blow to Economy](#) (*The Washington Post*)





03. Ask yourself these questions:

- What are we doing to close the digital divide within our organization- especially for employees unfamiliar with AI and related technologies?
- How do we ensure that employees are not left behind and have access to the training needed to work effectively alongside AI?
- How can we shift the narrative from "humans vs. machines" to "humans empowered by technology" in a way that reduces employee anxiety and resistance?
- What is the revised value proposition for humans in the loop, and how do we ensure that their contributions are recognized and compensated appropriately?
- As AI systems capture knowledge, how do we prevent the devaluation of senior employees who have been traditionally seen as knowledge holders?
- As workers, how do we identify our own IP that we may want to safeguard from integration into AI?



Have office workers had enough?



01. Description

A man left behind during a team-building mountain climb nearly lost his life, while a Wells Fargo employee passed away unnoticed at her desk for several days. PwC is electronically tracking employees' return-to-office compliance and Amazon is under a cloud of suspicion as to whether its full-time return-to-office mandate is really just a move to reduce headcount without the expense of layoffs. Social media abounds with references to the drudgery of corporate life. It is being suggested that there has been a fundamental shift in employees' psychological contract with work, moving from 'We pay you to do X.' to 'I am willing to do X for Y.' With an emboldened labor movement, the increased use of technology, and shifting generational patterns, deep shifts could be on the horizon. What can companies do to prepare for these changes in a way that enables the organization to thrive instead of being left behind?



02. Learn more

- [Wells Fargo Worker Found Dead at Her Desk Days After Clocking Into Work- Authorities Say \(CNN\)](#)
- [15 Workers on Office Retreat Hiked Up a Mountain and One Got Left Behind \(NPR\)](#)
- [Accounting Firm to Monitor Employees Using Location Tracker to Ensure In-Office Attendance \(International Business Times\)](#)
- [Job Stress Among Office Workers Linked to Higher Risk for Irregular Heart Rhythm \(American Heart Association News\)](#)
- [White-Collar Work Is Just Meetings Now \(The Atlantic\)](#)
- [Amazon's RTO charge is just layoffs in disguise, experts say \(Fortune\)](#)





03. Ask yourself these questions:

- Are we regularly assessing employee feedback on how their roles are changing, and are we aligning our management practices with these shifts?
- What systems can we put in place to demonstrate trust in employees' ability to manage their own productivity without excessive monitoring?
- Are there emerging technologies that help us effectively manage team performance, engagement, and motivation?
- How are we tapping into the mindset of the future workforce and preparing for their entry into our company?
- What work configuration enables us to maximize productivity while also serving the needs of our workers? What are our metrics for this?
- What does an effective office space look like for our organization? How do we determine what 'effective' means to us? To our employees?



Additional trends to watch

We'll keep an eye on these trends as they develop and let you know how they may impact innovation.

- California Sues Exxon, Alleges Plastics Deception (*The Wall Street Journal*)
- Young Americans Can't Keep Funding Boomers and Beyond (*The New York Times*)
- A Big Problem for Young Workers: 70/80 Year Olds Won't Retire (*The Washington Post*)
- AI Outpaces Ability to Secure Data: (Beta News)
- California Gov. Newsom vetoes AI bill in a win for Big Tech (*The Washington Post*)
- U.K., home of the industrial revolution, shuts its last coal-fired power plant (*The Washington Post*)



Acknowledgements

Thank you to IRI's Foresights Advisory Board for their wisdom and insights as we navigate the future of innovation.

- Olga Bekker, The Boeing Company
- Pradipta Chakraborty, Tata Consultancy Services
- Bernardita Chirino Chace, Novartis
- Tom Culver, RTI Innovation Advisors
- Fiona Jamison, Spring International
- Kyle Kent, Campbells
- Brittany Kunkel, New Edge
- Alyssa Mueller, Hess Corporation
- Erik Noyes, Babson College
- Nixon Opondo, The Boeing Company
- Cindy Polizzi, GE Aerospace
- Monika Sikand, The Boeing Company
- Joanna Skinner, Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs

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