

IRI QUARTERLY TRENDS ANALYZER



2025

JANUARY 2025

About The Trends Analyzer

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 potential 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 a bigger, 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.

January 2025 Trends

1

Are DEI programs dead?

2

Are we in a white-collar recession?

3

Tariff Preparation



ARE DEI PROGRAMS DEAD?

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives appear to be in decline. Some organizations are eliminating them based on shareholder pressure and in anticipation of changes already underway in the Trump administration. Others are simply moving the function under HR and roles are being rebranded and reassigned (with less of a bullhorn). Still others are eliminating positions because they can be expensive, and it is challenging to measure and demonstrate the impact of DEI.

Supporters value the role of DEI in fostering innovation, employee engagement, and diverse leadership pipelines. Proposed changes at the federal level will likely involve revising federal funding, contracts, or compliance standards tied to DEI with implementation possibly occurring within months through executive orders or legislative action. The most notable exception to this has been Costco, which, refusing to engage in any culture wars, has stated that DEI initiatives are good for business. Companies should anticipate challenges in maintaining inclusive workplaces, addressing employee expectations, and meeting stakeholder demands for social responsibility. What is the future of DEI programs and how will organizations respond to federal pushback? Is your organization monitoring these shifts and what strategies should be put in place to maintain the benefits of DEI?



ARE DEI PROGRAM DEAD?

Learn more:

- [The Downfall of DEI \(NPR\)](#)
- [Walmart Becomes the Latest Company to Roll Back Its DEI Policies \(Associated Press\)](#)
- [What Trump's Second Term Could Mean for DEI \(Harvard Business Review\)](#)
- [What the Next Trump Presidency Means for the Future of DEI \(Forbes\)](#)
- [Christopher Rufo Has Trump's Ear and Wants to End DEI for Good \(The Wall Street Journal\)](#)
- [What Brands Can Learn from Costco's No-nonsense Defense of DEI \(Fast Company\)](#)
- [Layoffs loom as Trump administration orders federal DEI workers on leave \(The Washington Post\)](#)



ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

1

How do we ensure inclusivity remains embedded in our culture and operations without relying on formal DEI programming?

2

Have we measured the impact of our DEI efforts and what outcomes can we demonstrate?

3

How are we preparing for potential regulatory and political changes that could impact DEI initiatives?

4

How does embedding DEI into HR affect accountability and effectiveness?

5

Are we aligned with generational expectations for workplace inclusion?

6

What role does inclusivity play in driving business performance and innovation in our organization?



ARE WE IN A WHITE COLLAR RECESSION?

The "white-collar recession" is a growing trend where professional roles, especially in tech, finance, and management, are seeing significant job cuts and hiring slowdowns due to AI and shifting corporate strategies. Less skilled white-collar roles like call center and customer service representatives are also seeing weakened demand.

Sectors like IT have experienced sharp declines in demand, with LinkedIn data showing a 27% drop in IT hiring. Call centers are struggling to fill the roles that they do have because potential applicants question whether the roles will be there in 12 months. Data analysts are particularly being impacted as companies replace their responsibilities with AI tools and opt for data scientists who bring a higher level of business acumen. The call center roles that do remain are focused on higher level challenges, with AI handling standard activities. This indicates an acceleration of replacing task-based roles with AI and premiums put on individuals with higher business acumen and problem-solving skills. What will be the implications for those trained in task-based roles? For entry-level roles? For education?



ARE WE IN A WHITE COLLAR RECESSION?

Learn more:

- [What You Need to Know About the Current State of the White Collar Job Market \(Forbes\)](#)
- [White Collar Recession Hits Tech \(Linkedin\)](#)
- [Why White Collar Workers Shouldn't Count on the September Surge This Year \(Forbes\)](#)
- [White Collar Recession: Worst Hit Jobs Are in the Tech Industry \(Business Insider\)](#)



ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

1

Are we rethinking the value of roles and skills in light of AI's capabilities?

2

What steps are we taking to align IT and data teams with broader business strategies?

3

Are we leveraging AI to enhance onboarding, upskilling, and workforce productivity?

4

What skills will be most critical to us in the next five years? How are we ensuring we have those skills in house?

5

How will entry level roles in our organization be impacted by AI? What will we do to maintain a steady in-flow of skills and potential new leaders?



TARIFF PREPARATION

On the campaign trail, Trump made it clear that tariffs would be a top priority for his administration. Since the election, confusion over what form the tariffs will take has only grown. Initially it seemed that Canada, Mexico, and China would be the primary targets, but rumors are swirling that specific, critical sectors will be the targets instead. Regardless of what happens in the first 100 days, threats of tariffs are likely to last throughout the second Trump administration. Companies are busily scenario planning potential implications while the stock market is pre-pricing in difficult times. How can companies insulate themselves from the uncertainty?

Learn more:

- [Trump is Revving Up His Tariff War- Here is What You Need to Know \(The Hill\)](#)
- [Trump's Tariffs May Be Targeted At Others- But They Could Impact You Too \(NPR\)](#)
- [Trump's Latest Tariff Plan Aims at Multiple Countries- What Does It Mean for the US? \(Associated Press\)](#)
- [What Does Trump's Latest Tariff Plan Mean for the US \(PBS\)](#)
- [Trump aides ready 'universal' tariff plans — with one key change \(The Washington Post\)](#)



ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

1

What is our exposure to potential tariffs and how are we mitigating that risk?

2

How do we prepare for potential consumer backlash due to rising costs?

3

How do we balance taxation and tariff policies with business sustainability?

4

How are we managing the costs of potential onshoring initiatives?

5

What contingency plans are in place if tariffs disproportionately affect key suppliers or markets?

6

How can we leverage new technologies to potentially offset costs?



ADDITIONAL TRENDS TO WATCH:

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

- What Trump Can and Can't Do to Reverse Climate Change Policy (*Scientific American*)
- These companies innovate and collaborate without office mandates (*The Washington Post*)
- Executives and Research Disagree About Hybrid Work (*The New York Times*)
- Killing of insurance CEO reveals simmering anger at US health system (BBC News)
- Can Low Unemployment Last Under Trump? (*The New York Times*)
- There is a Better Way to Predict A Technology's Future: Follow the Rate of Change (*Wall Street Journal*)



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, People Results
- Kyle Kent, Campbells
- Brittany Kunkel, New Edge
- Alyssa Mueller, Hess Corporation
- Erik Noyes, Babson College
- Nixon Opondo, The Boeing Company
- Joanna Skinner, Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs

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