

WONDERFUL WORK

POWERFUL INSIGHTS

MARCH 2025

This is the second in a market intelligence series from Tonic, designed to help businesses navigate the evolving world of work.

At Tonic, we believe in creating Wonderful Work That Works. Work that inspires, engages, and delivers real impact. Through this series, we bring you sharp, data-driven insights into talent trends, employer branding, and workplace culture, with a special focus on the UAE.

As digital transformation reshapes industries across the UAE, organisations are being challenged to rethink how they attract, retain, and develop talent. AI-driven hiring, hybrid work models, and the relentless demand for digital skills are rewriting the rules of engagement. And yet, at the centre of all this change, the fundamental question remains the same: How do we create workplaces where people want to be?

This edition explores what it means to be a digital-first employer, how businesses can future-proof their workforce, and why employee expectations are evolving faster than ever. With insights from Tonic's research team, industry reports, and market trends, we share practical ways to build stronger, digitally enabled employer brands in an era of transformation.

BOTTOM LINE:
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION ISN'T
JUST ABOUT TECHNOLOGY, IT'S
ABOUT TRUST.

NAVIGATING THE TALENT TRENDS THAT IMPACT EMPLOYERS IN THE UAE



**THE FUTURE
OF WORK IS
DIGITAL.
IS YOUR
ORGANISATION
READY?**

THE RISE OF THE DIGITAL-FIRST EMPLOYER

A decade ago, digital transformation was a corporate buzzword, a promise of automation, efficiency, and seamless workflows. Today, it's the foundation of how work happens. **In the UAE, businesses are reimagining not just the tools they use, but the very nature of work itself.** AI is no longer just an experiment in innovation; it's embedded in recruitment, employee experience, and workplace culture.

In the past year alone, **68% of UAE businesses have integrated AI-powered hiring tools.** What does that mean in practice? Hiring processes that are faster, fairer, and more data-driven. Talent analytics that predict engagement and retention. Automated workflows that remove friction from everyday tasks.

But becoming a digital-first employer isn't just about adopting new tech, it's about ensuring that **people remain at the heart of transformation.**

For businesses, the challenge is clear: How do you create an environment where digital tools enhance work, rather than overwhelm it? Where **employees feel empowered by technology, rather than replaced by it?**

Organisations that succeed at this don't just invest in digital tools; **they invest in culture, skills, and leadership** that bring those tools to life.

FUTURE-PROOFING YOUR WORKFORCE: THE UPSKILLING IMPERATIVE

The digital economy is evolving fast, and so are the skills needed to succeed in it.

Today, over half of UAE businesses are actively supporting digital upskilling. Government initiatives such as the National Digital Talent Program are accelerating the transition.

How businesses can prepare for the future:

- **Identifying skills gaps** – Understanding the digital capabilities your workforce will need in the next five years.
- **Creating a culture of continuous learning** – Why? Businesses that invest in upskilling see higher retention.
- **Leveraging government-backed programs** – Partnering with national initiatives to access digital training resources.

INSIGHT: Talent is increasingly choosing employers that invest in their growth. Organisations that embed learning and development into their EVP will attract and retain the best talent.

THE NEW EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE: FLEXIBILITY, WELL-BEING & DIGITAL COLLABORATION

Hybrid work, digital tools, and employee well-being are shaping the future of work in the UAE.

- 97% of UAE business leaders believe **hybrid work will remain a permanent feature** of the workplace.
- **44% of executives have introduced new work-life balance initiatives** to support employees in a digital-first world.
- **75% of job seekers** in the UAE use mobile devices to apply for jobs, reinforcing the need for a frictionless digital experience.

HOW EMPLOYERS CAN ADAPT

- **Hybrid work that works:** Building flexibility into your workplace culture while maintaining engagement.
- **AI & automation for well-being:** Using technology to reduce stress and improve work-life balance.
- **The importance of digital-first leadership:** Ensuring managers are equipped to lead in a tech-driven world.

HUMAN-FIRST, TECH-ENABLED: RETHINKING DIGITAL WORKPLACES

The narrative around digital transformation has often focused on efficiency. Automation replacing routine tasks, AI streamlining recruitment, data informing every decision. But while the technology is powerful, the most successful organisations aren't the ones adopting the latest tools the fastest, they're the ones **creating human-centred digital workplaces**.

In the UAE, **two-thirds of companies are now using AI-driven recruitment tools**, and hybrid work models are firmly embedded in corporate strategies. Yet, **40% of employees report feeling disconnected in increasingly digital environments**. The paradox is clear: as work becomes more automated, engagement and belonging require more intentional effort than ever.

Forward-thinking employers are responding by **investing in digital well-being, creating frictionless work experiences, and ensuring that leadership is equipped to manage teams across virtual and physical spaces**.

These aren't just "nice-to-haves". They are critical to attracting and retaining the next generation of talent.

MARCH'S FINAL THOUGHT

Digital transformation isn't just about technology, it's about trust. As the UAE drives forward with its digital ambitions, the organisations that thrive won't be those with the most sophisticated AI models or the largest tech budgets. They will be the ones that build trust, invest in skills, and design workplaces where people feel connected and empowered. **The future of work isn't just digital. It's human.**