

# APAC Market Report – Opportunities in the Hiring Landscape

## Key Insights

- As companies adapt to an increasingly complex business and talent environment, several key opportunities are emerging in the APAC hiring landscape.
- Skills-based hiring will help to increase the talent pipeline amidst rapid changes in jobs and skills.
- Lateral internal mobility provides opportunities for career growth and encourages talent retention.
- Returning employees are a rich and under-tapped talent pool for organisations looking to blend internal familiarity with external experience.

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## 1. Introduction

In today's increasingly complex and competitive environment, companies are reshaping their workforce strategies to adapt to rapidly changing skills demands and evolving market trends. Between 2016 to 2024, skills changed by 40%, and this change is expected to continue rising up to 70% by 2030.

In this report, we highlight several key opportunities that are emerging in the APAC hiring landscape. Skills-based hiring, where employers prioritise candidates' capabilities over traditional qualifications and previous job titles, will help to address talent shortages and adapt to evolving job requirements. Additionally, lateral internal mobility will help companies prioritise upskilling and career progression to retain talent and enhance workforce agility. Last but not least, returning employees - workers returning to their previous employers - provide a rich talent pool for organisations looking to tap into experienced professionals who are already familiar with company culture and operations, while bringing fresh external insights to drive innovation and growth.

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## 2. Skills-Based Hiring

As companies adapt to rapidly evolving market needs and skills demands, skills-based hiring is emerging as a critical strategy to build stronger and more diverse talent pipelines. By focusing on candidates' capabilities, organisations can tap into a broader pool of talent and better address the skills shortages across various sectors. This approach is especially beneficial in an era where job roles are constantly changing and the demand for new skills is growing exponentially.

### 2.1. Over 20% of hires in APAC have job titles that didn't exist 20 years ago

In a rapidly evolving job market, technological advancements and industry shifts have given rise to entirely new career paths. Many of today's most in-demand roles, such as AI specialists, data scientists, cybersecurity analysts, cloud engineers, and sustainability managers, were virtually unheard of two decades ago. Our analysis finds that globally, over 10% of professionals hired today have job titles that didn't even exist in 2000. And this number is even higher in some APAC markets like Australia (20%), Malaysia (20%), New Zealand (20%), and Singapore (30%).

Country	Percent of hires into jobs that didn't exist in 2000
Australia	20%
Indonesia	10%
India	10%
Malaysia	20%
New Zealand	20%
Philippines	10%
Singapore	30%

Table: Share of hires into jobs that didn't exist in 2000

Methodology: XXXXXX

Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

This transformation underscores the importance of a skills-based approach to hiring. Rather than relying solely on traditional qualifications and job titles, companies must focus on candidates' core competencies and adaptability. As industries continue to evolve, hiring for skills over titles ensures a more agile and future-ready workforce.

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### 2.2. A skills-based approach can significantly expand talent pipelines

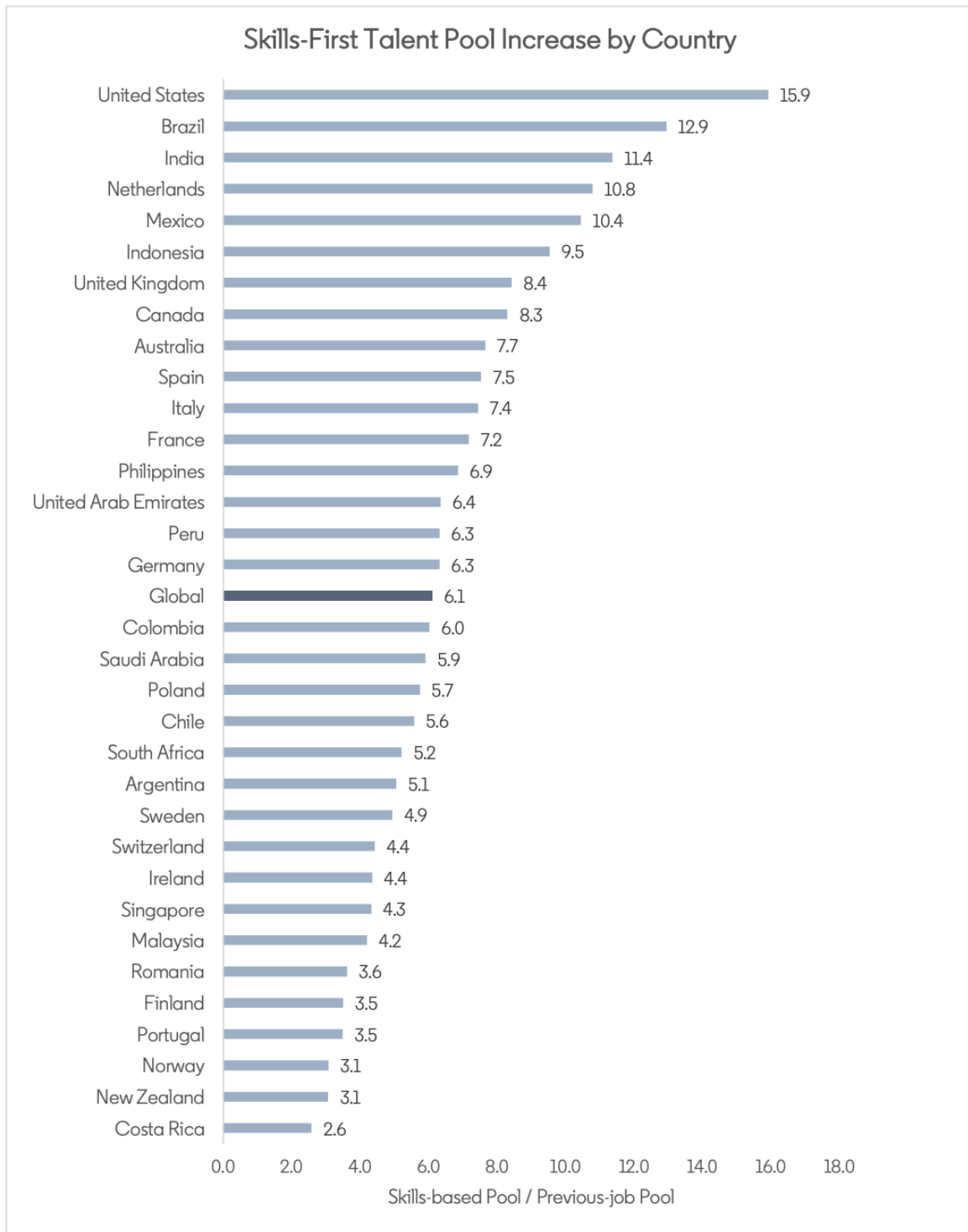
Our analysis finds that adopting a skills-based hiring strategy can dramatically increase the available talent pool. By evaluating candidates based on their relevant skills rather than requiring specific job titles, organisations can expand their talent pipeline by up to six times globally. The impact is even more pronounced in various APAC markets.

- India: 11.4x expansion
- Indonesia: 9.5x expansion
- Australia: 7.7x expansion
- Philippines: 6.9x expansion

And even in markets where the increase is slightly smaller, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and New Zealand, a skills-based approach still expands the talent pool by an impressive 3 to 4 times.

By shifting the focus from conventional educational or predominantly experience-based criteria to practical skills, employers can access a much wider pool of candidates, including those who may have been overlooked by traditional hiring practices. This will not only help address current talent shortages but also ensure a more agile and flexible workforce, ready to meet evolving business needs.

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Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph Research Institute. Country values were ordered by pipeline expansion.

Chart: Skills-first talent pool increase by country

Methodology: The skills-first talent pool increase is the ratio of the total number of job candidates identified through the skills-based hiring approach compared to the number identified via prior job title searches.

Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

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## 3. Lateral Internal Mobility

Lateral internal mobility refers to employees moving within an organisation to a different role at the same level. This creates a win-win situation for both employers and employees. It offers employees new pathways to grow while improving engagement, learning, and retention, resulting in a stronger and more stable organisation. In this section, we analyse lateral internal mobility trends to provide insights for professionals looking to advance their careers within their organisations and talent leaders looking to enhance workforce development strategies.

### 3.1. Majority of internal moves are lateral

Our latest analysis finds that in APAC, the ratio of internal moves to external hires has increased by over 14% over the past three years (between 2022 to 2024). More interestingly, on average in 2024, more than 4 out of 5 of internal moves are lateral rather than promotions. This indicates that employees are frequently transitioning between roles at the same level, otherwise known as lateral internal movements.

Country	Share of lateral internal movements (2024)
Australia	85.6%
Indonesia	82.6%
India	86.1%
Malaysia	85.4%
New Zealand	85.6%
Philippines	88.6%
Singapore	81.4%

Table: Share of lateral internal moves in 2024  
 Methodology: This table shows the share of all internal movements that are at the same seniority level (lateral movements).  
 Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

The large proportion of lateral movement debunks a common misconception that career growth only happens upwards. In reality, lateral mobility offers significant value to both employees and organisations. For employees, moving laterally presents an opportunity to expand their skill sets, gain exposure to new areas of the business, and develop a more well-rounded understanding of the organisation. This fosters professional growth and can enhance job satisfaction as employees embrace new challenges without the pressure of climbing the hierarchy. For organisations, lateral mobility improves workforce flexibility and drives innovation by fostering a more agile, adaptable team.

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Employees with diverse skills are better positioned to solve complex challenges and collaborate across departments, contributing to overall business success. By promoting lateral moves, companies can cultivate a resilient workforce that is better equipped to navigate the dynamic nature of modern business environments.

This also challenges the common misconception that career growth within an organisation is solely achieved through vertical advancement. Many employees assume that without a promotion, there is no progression, but lateral moves can be just as valuable for career development. Such moves provide opportunities to acquire new skills, broaden professional networks, and gain exposure to different aspects of the business—all of which contribute to career growth. By shifting this perspective, organisations can foster a more engaged workforce, where growth is seen as a broader concept that extends beyond simply climbing the corporate ladder.

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### 3.2. Lateral mobility is greatest between Engineering and IT

One of the greatest benefits of lateral moves is the exposure to new areas of the business, particularly to different functional areas. Our analysis also found that many of the common cross-functional movements are bi-directional, meaning that there is constant exchange of talent in both directions. For example, in India, there is talent flowing in both directions between Engineering and IT.

This kind of cross-functional experience allows employees to develop a broader skill set and a deeper understanding of how various departments contribute to the organisation's overall goals. For employees, it creates opportunities for career growth by enhancing their versatility and preparing them for more complex roles in the future. For organisations, promoting lateral moves strengthens collaboration across functions, fosters innovation, and creates a more agile workforce that can adapt to changing business needs.

Some of the most common lateral cross-functional movements in 2024 include IT to Engineering in Australia, India, New Zealand and the Philippines; Accounting to Finance in Indonesia; Engineering to Operations in Malaysia; and Business Development to Sales in Singapore. More data can be found in the appendix.

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### 3.3. Lateral mobility increases with company size, but not evenly across seniority levels.

Lateral mobility patterns differ based on company size. Unsurprisingly, the proportion of lateral moves increases with company size. Larger organisations, with more employees, will also have more opportunities for individuals to explore different functions within the company.

However, not all employees benefit equally. Compared to entry-level roles, lateral moves are 4.8 times less common at the manager level and 3.6 times less common at leadership level. This disparity is especially pronounced in smaller companies. With fewer departments and a more limited range of specialised roles, there's often less room for cross-functional movement, particularly for senior staff.

Managers and leaders in smaller firms may find it even harder to shift across functions due to organisational constraints rather than lack of interest or ability. In contrast, larger organisations are better equipped to support lateral mobility even at higher levels. Their broader internal structures allow senior employees to explore new roles without leaving the company, which can support leadership development, skill diversification, and long-term retention.

Entry-level vs Manager-level				
Country	Small-Medium Business (less than 200 employees)	Mid-Market Enterprises (201 to 1000 employees)	Enterprise (1001 to 5000 employees)	Large Enterprise (more than 5000 employees)
Australia	4.2	3.8	4.4	4.1
Indonesia	5.1	4.5	4.2	3.9
India	4.7	4.1	4.0	4.3
Malaysia	5.7	4.3	3.9	4.7
New Zealand	4.8	4.0	4.5	4.1
Philippines	7.7	8.3	6.9	6.4
Singapore	4.5	4.0	3.8	4.5

Table: Comparison of lateral moves at entry-level versus manager-level

Methodology: This table compares the share of lateral moves within seniority levels, for entry-level versus manager-level, at companies of different sizes. For example, lateral moves are 4.2 times less common at the manager-level compared to at the entry-level for employees in Small-Medium Businesses.

Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph



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Entry-level vs Leadership-level				
Country	Small-Medium Business (less than 200 employees)	Mid-Market Enterprises (201 to 1000 employees)	Enterprise (1001 to 5000 employees)	Large Enterprise (more than 5000 employees)
Australia	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.8
Indonesia	4.0	5.0	3.3	3.7
India	3.0	3.0	2.6	2.6
Malaysia	3.6	3.4	4.1	3.1
New Zealand	4.0	3.8	6.8	4.3
Philippines	4.0	3.2	2.5	2.9
Singapore	3.0	3.3	3.1	2.3

Table: Comparison of lateral moves at entry-level versus leadership-level

Methodology: This table compares the share of lateral moves within seniority levels, for entry-level versus leadership-level, at companies of different sizes. For example, lateral moves are 3.9 times less common at the leadership-level compared to at the entry-level for employees in Small-Medium Businesses.

Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

Companies of all sizes can benefit from fostering a culture of internal mobility, but they may need to tailor their strategies based on their organisational structure and available opportunities. Larger organisations, with their broader range of roles and departments, can create more pathways for employees to explore different functions and progress within the company. Smaller companies, on the other hand, may need to be more creative in offering lateral mobility, such as encouraging cross-functional projects or temporary role changes, to help employees gain diverse experience. By aligning internal mobility strategies with the company's size and structure, organisations can enhance employee engagement, retention, and career development at all levels.

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### 4. Returning Employees

Return employees (former workers who return after gaining external experience) offer organisations a valuable blend of fresh insights and deep institutional knowledge. Their familiarity with the company reduces onboarding time and lowers training costs, while their new experiences drive innovation and enhance collaboration. In this section, we analyse return employee trends to provide insights for professionals considering rejoining a former employer and for talent leaders looking to tap into this often-overlooked talent pool.

#### 4.1. Return employees are an under-tapped pool of potential leadership hires

Our prior research into senior leaders in [the US](#) and [Singapore](#) shows a growing trend of senior leaders gaining diverse experiences across multiple industries, functions, and companies. However, the same research also found that the majority of senior leaders are promoted from within, rather than hired externally. This juxtaposition can be reconciled with hiring return employees into leadership roles. These return employees combine deep institutional knowledge with rich external experience.

Our data finds that of all leadership hires in APAC in 2024, less than 3% are return employees. This indicates that while returning employees are a valuable pool of talent, they remain an underutilised resource for senior leadership positions.

Country	Share of return employees in entry-level hires	Share of return employees in manager-level hires	Share of return employees in leadership-level hires
Australia	3.8%	3.6%	2.3%
Indonesia	2.8%	2.4%	2.7%
India	2.0%	2.7%	2.6%
Malaysia	2.9%	3.1%	2.8%
New Zealand	4.1%	3.5%	2.2%
Philippines	2.3%	2.5%	3.2%
Singapore	3.8%	3.7%	3.2%

*Table: Share of return employees at different seniority levels.*

*Methodology: We calculate the share of return employees out of all hires into the respective seniority levels.*

*Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph*

By proactively engaging with high-potential former employees and creating pathways for their return at leadership levels, organisations can access a proven talent pool that blends institutional knowledge with

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diverse external perspectives. As companies increasingly focus on internal mobility and skills-based hiring, leveraging return employees for leadership roles presents a strategic opportunity to strengthen leadership pipelines and drive long-term business success.

### 4.2. Female returners are more likely to be hired into senior leadership than males

Another interesting trend we found was that women have a higher chance to be hired to leadership as a return employees. Across the APAC countries analysed, an average of 35% of all leadership return employee hires are female, whereas 32% of all leadership hires are female. This means that females' odds of being hired into leadership increase by 14% with their former employers compared to being hired externally. This trend was observed across most countries in the APAC region in 2024, with the exception of India.

Country	Share of female leadership return employees	Share of female leadership hires	Increase in odds
Australia	36.4%	33.0%	16.2%
India	19.4%	19.8%	-2.5%
Malaysia	37.9%	33.3%	22.2%
New Zealand	31.4%	31.1%	1.4%
Philippines	47.9%	41.7%	28.5%
Singapore	37.7%	33.7%	19.1%

Table: Trends in female leadership return employees

Methodology: Out of all return hires into leadership positions, we calculate the share of females, and compare it against the overall share of females who are hired into leadership to get the increase in odds of females being hired into a leadership role with a former employer.

Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

This suggests that organisations are recognising the value of diverse leadership and may be more inclined to tap into the female return employee pool for senior positions. Return employment offers an important pathway for increasing female representation in leadership roles, as companies can leverage the experience and institutional knowledge of returning female leaders. By analysing these trends, organisations can uncover opportunities to better support the progression of female talent into leadership positions, thus strengthening their overall diversity efforts.

Organisations should also be intentional about removing barriers to leadership roles for women - whether they are internal promotions, returning employees or external candidates. This will create a leadership team that is truly diverse and inclusive, ultimately benefiting the organisation in the long term.

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### 5. Conclusion

Skills-based hiring is transforming the way companies attract and retain talent, shifting the focus from traditional credentials to competencies and potential. By prioritising skills over job titles or degrees, organisations can better match employees to roles, foster career growth, and build a more agile workforce. This approach naturally supports internal mobility, enabling employees to transition across roles, functions, and even geographies based on their evolving skill sets. Employees who move internally are 40% more likely to stay for at least three years, making internal mobility a key driver of retention, leadership development, and workforce adaptability.

In addition to internal movement, the rise of returning employees (those rejoining former employers) further presents an opportunity for both employers and employees. Returning employees bring a valuable combination of external experience and institutional knowledge, reinforcing the importance of long-term workplace relationships. Furthermore, as organisations focus more on retention, engagement, and employer branding, the ability to attract and welcome back former employees reflects a strong workplace culture and a commitment to career development. This opportunity underscores the value of maintaining positive alumni networks and recognising that career paths are increasingly fluid, with employees seeking environments that offer both familiarity and new growth opportunities.

As businesses navigate evolving market demands, a combination of skills-based hiring, strong internal mobility strategies, and efforts to welcome back talented former employees may become essential for driving both employee satisfaction and organisational resilience.

# Appendix

## Most common internal lateral movements between functions

Country	Rank	Original Function	New Function
Australia	1	Information Technology	Engineering
Australia	2	Customer Success and Support	Operations
Australia	3	Sales	Business Development
Australia	4	Sales	Operations
Australia	5	Business Development	Sales
Indonesia	1	Accounting	Finance
Indonesia	2	Engineering	Operations
Indonesia	3	Business Development	Sales
Indonesia	4	Finance	Accounting
Indonesia	5	Operations	Engineering
India	1	Information Technology	Engineering
India	2	Engineering	Information Technology
India	3	Engineering	Quality Assurance
India	4	Engineering	Operations
India	5	Quality Assurance	Engineering
Malaysia	1	Engineering	Operations
Malaysia	2	Operations	Engineering
Malaysia	3	Information Technology	Engineering
Malaysia	4	Engineering	Information Technology
Malaysia	5	Operations	Business Development
New Zealand	1	Information Technology	Engineering
New Zealand	2	Sales	Operations

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New Zealand	3	Operations	Sales
New Zealand	4	Customer Success and Support	Operations
New Zealand	5	Engineering	Information Technology
Philippines	1	Information Technology	Engineering
Philippines	2	Engineering	Information Technology
Philippines	3	Accounting	Finance
Philippines	4	Customer Success and Support	Operations
Philippines	5	Engineering	Operations
Singapore	1	Business Development	Sales
Singapore	2	Information Technology	Engineering
Singapore	3	Sales	Business Development
Singapore	4	Engineering	Information Technology
Singapore	5	Operations	Business Development

# Methodology

**Data and Privacy** - This body of work represents the world seen through LinkedIn data, drawn from the anonymized and aggregated profile information of LinkedIn's 1+ billion members around the world. As such, it is influenced by how members choose to use the platform, which can vary based on professional, social, and regional culture, as well as overall site availability and accessibility. In publishing these insights from LinkedIn's Economic Graph, we want to provide accurate statistics while ensuring our members' privacy. As a result, all data show aggregated information for the corresponding period following strict data quality thresholds that prevent disclosing any information about specific individuals.

**Skills-based hiring** - A skills-based hiring approach creates a talent pool (the group of eligible candidates for a job position) composed of workers who have at least half of the top skills of the target job, compared to traditional talent pools comprised of workers who have previously worked in the given occupation. By evaluating candidates based on their relevant skills rather than requiring specific job titles, organisations can expand their talent pipeline by up to six times globally. The impact is even more pronounced in various APAC markets.

**Internal mobility** - Internal mobility is defined as any change in position by an employee within the same company. It includes both promotions (change in position that results in a higher seniority level) and lateral movements (change in position that does not result in a higher seniority level).

**Return employee** - Return employees are defined as any employees who returned to a previous company after holding a position at a different company for at least 2 consecutive months.

**Gender Classification** - Gender identity isn't binary and we recognize that some LinkedIn members identify beyond the traditional gender constructs of "man" and "woman." If not explicitly self-identified, we have inferred the gender of members included in this analysis either by the pronouns used on their LinkedIn profiles, or inferred on the basis of first name. Members whose gender could not be inferred as either man or woman were excluded from this analysis.

**Company Size Classification** - A company's size is determined by the 12-month average number of LinkedIn members who listed an active position in the listed company for the 12-month period of January to December 2024. We split company sizes into 3 main categories: Small-Medium Business (less than 200 global employees), Mid-Market Enterprises (201-1,000 global employees), Enterprise (1,001-5000 global employees), and Large Enterprise (more than 5000 global employees).

**Seniority Classification** - For this report, the seniority levels are defined as entry-level, manager-level, and leadership-level (VP or C-suite).