



# The Skills Top HR Companies Want

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## Overview

The most progressive organizations are diversifying their skills identification inputs and taking the pulse of skills trends and changes using external data. HR leaders can use this report as an input for their skills needs identification processes for eight critical HR roles. Armed with this knowledge, they can feel confident in the specific skills they help HR employees at their organizations develop.

### Key Findings

- Organizations can look to leading HR organizations and their demand for specific skills as an indicator of emerging and expiring HR skills. These unbiased, robust market trends should serve as one of many inputs HR leaders use for skills identification.
- Leading HR organizations differ from other organizations in the skills they target for six of the eight largest HR roles. For the most in-demand roles (HR manager and HR specialist), most organizations are aligned with the leading HR organizations in the skills they seek.

### Recommendations

To build critical skills and competencies, HR leaders should:

- Improve the skills needs identification process by using the data and trends in this report to diversify your inputs.
- Investigate skills that leading HR organizations have prioritized for their current and potential applications within the context of your own organization. Organizations may consider increasing investment in the acquisition and development of these emerging skills.
- Consider decreasing investment in the development of skills that leading HR organizations have deprioritized.

# Introduction and How to Use This Report

This report will give HR leaders a glimpse into the changing environment of HR and help them better understand how to identify the HR skills necessary for the future.

## Technology's Influence on Today's HR Skills

In today's work environment, HR's role is constantly changing to meet evolving organizational needs. As organizations transform to keep up with technology and digitalization, HR must also change the way it supports its workforce. This includes recruiting future talent, updating employee incentives to align with changing employee preferences, driving D&I initiatives and integrating Generation Z employees.

Successfully executing future HR strategies requires many technical skills highly desired by most organizations today. The majority of emerging, new-to-world skills are technical, deriving from the need to better leverage evolving technologies and progress in a work environment influenced by digitalization. Skills such as proficiency in general ledger software, SaaS and HR information systems have taken priority and are used by most HR organizations — not just companies known to have progressive HR functions.

Taking the pulse of emerging skills in the HR space will ultimately maximize the organization wide effectiveness of companies' greatest asset: their employees.

### The Market Should Inform Skills Identification Efforts

Organizations typically identify new skills demands through partnerships with the business and HR leadership at their own organizations. However, these conversations often fail to keep up with the rapid change of technical skills required for key HR roles. Organizations should therefore also interview a mix of subject matter experts, frontline employees and recruiters, trade publications, blogs and market trends.

Scraping and aggregating data from online job boards offers an unbiased, market-validated perspective that can help track changing demand for skills. To focus the analysis on technical HR skills, organizations can look to industry experts — the leading HR organizations that have been effectively cultivating HR talent. For this report, we identified the 15 organizations most frequently profiled by us for best practices in HR over the past five years: American Express, BP, Cargill, Cisco, Delhaize, General Electric, General Mills, Hebert Smith Freehills, IBM, Intel, National Grid, PayPal, Philips, Shell and Unilever. We refer to them throughout as “leading HR organizations” — companies with leading practices. HR leaders can use the hiring trends of these leading HR organizations as an indicator for emerging and expiring HR skills to inform their HR needs analyses.

## How to Use This Report

For each of the most in-demand HR roles, we report the top 15 technical skills HR leaders request. For each skill, we then compare the percentage change in demand over the previous year for the leading HR organizations and for all other companies.

The data in this report should both inform and supplement other skills identification analyses to give organizations an edge in identifying emerging HR skill needs.

## Skills by Critical HR Role

We reviewed the eight most in-demand HR roles in 2018: HR specialist; HR manager; training and development specialist; HR assistant; training and development manager; compensation, benefits and job analysis specialist; payroll and timekeeping clerk; and compensation and benefits manager (see Figure 1).

To help HR upskill and reskill HR employees as quickly and effectively as possible, we then analyzed the 15 most critical skills for those roles.

Figure 1: Most In-Demand HR Job Roles

### Most In-Demand HR Job Roles

Role	Number of Job Postings in the U.S. (1 January 2018 to 31 December 2018)
HR Specialist	177,302
HR Manager	161,789
Training and Development Specialist	130,488
HR Assistant, Except Payroll and Timekeeping	50,247
Training and Development Manager	26,681
Compensation, Benefits and Job Analysis Specialist	26,213
Payroll and Timekeeping Clerk	15,192
Compensation and Benefits Manager	13,724

Source: Gartner TalentNeuron

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## HR Specialists

Ninety-eight percent of the S&P 100 recruited HR specialists in 2018, making it one of the most sought-after roles of any function. The HR specialist role includes job titles such as technical recruiter, sourcing team member and talent acquisition partner.

Leading HR organizations and other organizations have similar future development focuses for many of the skills required in the HR specialist role. However, HR leaders have increased their investment in one critical skill where other organizations are decreasing investment: legal compliance.

On the other hand, while most organizations are increasing their demand for CRM skills for HR specialists, leading HR organizations have started to decrease their demand, suggesting these skills are becoming less valuable (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Demand for HR Specialists

### Demand for HR Specialists

- • Increasing in demand for HR leaders *and*  
■ • No demand, stagnant or decreasing in demand for all other organizations
- • Increasing, decreasing or stagnant in demand for both HR leaders and all other organizations *or*  
■ • Decreasing in demand for HR leaders, but no demand for all other organizations
- • Decreasing in demand for HR leaders *and*  
■ • Stagnant or increasing in demand for all other organizations

Skill	Change (HR Leaders)	Change (Others)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (HR Leaders)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (Others)
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Legal Compliance	26%	-28%	1%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Artificial Intelligence	3400%	100%	1%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Conducting Research	1185%	72%	5%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Microsoft Office Visio	800%	16%	1%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Full Lifecycle Recruiting	780%	73%	1%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Online Databases	533%	38%	2%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Bilingual (Spanish)	350%	28%	2%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Oracle PeopleSoft	322%	59%	1%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Technical Recruiting	339%	89%	4%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> HR Information System (HRIS)	230%	79%	1%	1%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Executive Recruiting	218%	76%	3%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Microsoft Office	336%	246%	13%	4%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Application Development	N/A	71%	5%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Applicant Tracking Software	87%	49%	4%	2%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> Customer Relationship Management (CRM)	-13%	94%	5%	1%

Source: Gartner TalentNeuron

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## HR Managers

Ninety-nine percent of the S&P 100 recruited HR managers in 2018, making it the most ubiquitously sought-after HR role. This role includes job titles such as HR generalist, HR director and HR business partner.

All organizations are increasing their demand for the same 14 skills for the HR manager role.[1] However, leading HR organizations have begun demanding data mining skills in the past year, suggesting it is a newly emerging skill for the role that may become more popular with time (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Demand for HR Managers

### Demand for HR Managers

- • Increasing in demand for HR leaders and
- • Increasing, decreasing or stagnant in demand for both HR leaders and all other organizations or
- • No demand, stagnant or decreasing in demand for all other organizations
- • Decreasing in demand for HR leaders, but no demand for all other organizations

Skill	Change (HR Leaders)	Change (Others)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (HR Leaders)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (Others)
■ Data Mining	N/A	N/A	2%	N/A
■ Information Security	5700%	28%	2%	0%
■ Microsoft SharePoint	1300%	47%	3%	1%
■ Oracle PeopleSoft	767%	10%	3%	4%
■ Six Sigma	609%	29%	3%	1%
■ Conducting Research	571%	24%	2%	0%
■ Succession Planning	370%	35%	16%	15%
■ Customer Success	428%	125%	4%	0%
■ HR Management System (HRMS)	284%	35%	5%	1%
■ HR Information System (HRIS)	269%	43%	4%	19%
■ Software as a Service (SaaS)	308%	99%	2%	0%
■ Microsoft Office	409%	216%	9%	23%
■ Legal Compliance	10%	21%	0%	4%
■ Process Excellence	N/A	11%	3%	0%
■ Acquisition Integration	43%	49%	2%	0%

Source: Gartner TalentNeuron

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## Training and Development Specialists

Ninety-eight percent of the S&P 100 recruited training and development specialists in 2018, making it a highly sought-after HR role. The training and development specialist role includes job titles such as team lead or trainer, learning environmental specialist, and training or organizational development specialist.

Leading HR organizations have different recruitment and development strategies compared to all other organizations for five of the most in-demand skills for training and development specialists (see Figure 4):

- Leading organizations are increasing their demand for three skills that other companies have not yet started recruiting for: QMS, legal compliance and dashboard metrics.
- Conversely, leading organizations are decreasing their investment in two skills that other organizations increasingly demand: Adobe Captivate and technical support.

Figure 4: Demand for Training and Development Specialists

### Demand for Training and Development Specialists

- • Increasing in demand for HR leaders *and*
  - No demand, stagnant or decreasing in demand for all other organizations
- • Increasing, decreasing or stagnant in demand for both HR leaders and all other organizations *or*
  - Decreasing in demand for HR leaders, but no demand for all other organizations
- • Decreasing in demand for HR leaders *and*
  - Stagnant or increasing in demand for all other organizations

Skill	Change (HR Leaders)	Change (Others)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (HR Leaders)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (Others)
■ Quality Management System (QMS)	128%	N/A	2%	0%
■ Legal Compliance	19%	N/A	5%	0%
■ Dashboard Metrics	N/A	N/A	2%	0%
■ Software as a Service (SaaS)	1400%	51%	2%	2%
■ Six Sigma	1128%	68%	4%	0%
■ Salesforce CRM	491%	57%	3%	2%
■ Microsoft SharePoint	165%	31%	4%	4%
■ Microsoft Office	54%	155%	17%	22%
■ Training Design	64%	23%	2%	2%
■ TechSmith Camtasia	-29%	-7%	3%	2%
■ Adobe Systems Adobe Connect	-23%	-6%	9%	1%
■ Learning Management System (LMS)	39%	23%	22%	13%
■ Cisco WebEx	12%	10%	19%	2%
■ Adobe Captivate	-25%	52%	4%	6%
■ Technical Support	-21%	19%	13%	2%

Source: Gartner TalentNeuron

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## HR Assistants

The HR assistant role includes job titles such as HR technician, recruiting assistant and HR executive assistant.

Leading HR organizations are just now demanding four skills that most other organizations have been requesting for a more extended period of time: Salesforce CRM, HRMS, payroll software and CRM. On the other hand, they are increasing their demand for

data validation – a skill for which they have been recruiting for at least two years but which other organizations have only recently started demanding.

Lastly, leading HR organizations have just begun demanding four emerging skills in 2018, which are worth exploring further: CSR, drug discovery, Java and business insights (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Demand for HR Assistants

### Demand for HR Assistants

- • Increasing in demand for HR leaders and
- • Increasing, decreasing or stagnant in demand for both HR leaders and all other organizations or
- • No demand, stagnant or decreasing in demand for all other organizations
- • Decreasing in demand for HR leaders, but no demand for all other organizations

Skill	Change (HR Leaders)	Change (Others)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (HR Leaders)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (Others)
■ Data Validation	600%	N/A	4%	0%
■ Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	N/A	N/A	6%	0%
■ Drug Discovery	N/A	N/A	4%	0%
■ Java	N/A	N/A	3%	0%
■ Business Insights	N/A	N/A	3%	0%
■ Microsoft SharePoint	500%	43%	4%	2%
■ English Speaker	200%	17%	2%	1%
■ Bilingual (Spanish)	200%	23%	6%	2%
■ Attendance Tracking	200%	54%	4%	1%
■ Microsoft Office	82%	192%	26%	26%
■ Salesforce CRM	N/A	60%	1%	0%
■ Conducting Research	75%	41%	13%	0%
■ HR Management System (HRMS)	N/A	33%	2%	2%
■ Payroll Software	N/A	8%	1%	0%
■ Customer Relationship Management (CRM)	N/A	6%	3%	0%

Source: Gartner TalentNeuron

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## Training and Development Managers

The training and development manager role includes job titles such as leadership development manager, talent development advisor, and learning strategy and integration manager.

Compared to the other HR roles covered in this report, the training and development manager role shows significant differences between the skills sought

by leading HR organizations and those sought by other organizations. Leading organizations are decreasing their investment in one skill that all other organizations are increasing investment in: LMS. However, in 2018 leading HR organizations started demanding two new skills that other organizations have not: EVM and virtual reality (see Figure 6). These emerging skills are worth investigating moving forward.

Figure 6: Demand for Training and Development Managers

### Demand for Training and Development Managers

- • Increasing in demand for HR leaders *and*  
 • No demand, stagnant or decreasing in demand for all other organizations
- • Increasing, decreasing or stagnant in demand for both HR leaders and all other organizations *or*  
 • Decreasing in demand for HR leaders, but no demand for all other organizations
- • Decreasing in demand for HR leaders *and*  
 • Stagnant or increasing in demand for all other organizations

Skill	Change (HR Leaders)	Change (Others)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (HR Leaders)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (Others)
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Six Sigma	400%	-0%	2%	0%
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Integrated Marketing	200%	N/A	0%	0%
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Earned Value Management (EVM)	N/A	N/A	1%	0%
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Virtual Reality	N/A	N/A	0%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Succession Planning	1080%	41%	10%	6%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Software as a Service (SaaS)	N/A	107%	9%	1%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Quality Assurance (QA)	100%	6%	2%	3%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Blueprints	140%	65%	2%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Salesforce CRM	N/A	46%	14%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Microsoft Office	180%	148%	2%	19%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Legal Compliance	-18%	N/A	2%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Customer Relationship Management (CRM)	-9%	-18%	13%	1%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Microsoft SharePoint	12%	7%	2%	3%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Training Design	25%	23%	1%	3%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> Learning Management System (LMS)	-87%	55%	2%	15%

Source: Gartner TalentNeuron

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## Compensation, Benefits and Job Analysis Specialists

The compensation, benefits and job analysis specialist role includes job titles such as payroll coordinator, benefits analyst and total rewards specialist.

While most organizations are increasing their demand for Oracle PeopleSoft skills, leading HR organizations are beginning to curb their demand. In contrast, leading HR organizations have increased

their demand for legal compliance skills while most organizations have started to decrease their investment.

Leading HR organizations started demanding three new skills in 2018: payroll software, business insights and recruitment advertising (see Figure 7). This may suggest these three new skills are emerging for this role, and other functions should consider whether investing in them makes sense for their future strategies.

Figure 7: Demand for Compensation, Benefits and Job Analysis Specialists

### Demand for Compensation, Benefits and Job Analysis Specialists

- • Increasing in demand for HR leaders and  
 • No demand, stagnant or decreasing in demand for all other organizations
- • Increasing, decreasing or stagnant in demand for both HR leaders and all other organizations or  
 • Decreasing in demand for HR leaders, but no demand for all other organizations
- • Decreasing in demand for HR leaders and  
 • Stagnant or increasing in demand for all other organizations

Skill	Change (HR Leaders)	Change (Others)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (HR Leaders)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (Others)
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Call Management Systems	150%	N/A	3%	0%
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Legal Compliance	67%	-17%	3%	2%
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Payroll Software	N/A	N/A	4%	0%
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Business Insights	N/A	N/A	1%	0%
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Recruitment Advertising	N/A	N/A	1%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> HR Information System (HRIS)	400%	38%	7%	29%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Regression Analysis	N/A	129%	1%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Microsoft Access	N/A	40%	2%	2%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Time and Attendance	N/A	36%	4%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Technical Support	N/A	23%	2%	2%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Conducting Research	N/A	22%	1%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Microsoft Office	225%	206%	18%	28%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Microsoft Visual Basic for Applications (VBA)	N/A	19%	1%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> User Acceptance Testing (UAT)	33%	17%	3%	0%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> Oracle PeopleSoft	-25%	5%	2%	7%

Source: Gartner TalentNeuron

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## Payroll and Timekeeping Clerks

The payroll and timekeeping clerk role includes job titles such as corporate payroll administrator, time and attendance systems administrator, and payroll technician.

For four of the most in-demand skills for payroll and timekeeping clerks, leading HR organizations have different recruitment and development strategies compared to all other organizations.

Leading organizations are significantly decreasing their demand for three skills (time and attendance, legal compliance and payroll tax), while other organizations are increasing their demand. Moreover, business insight skills appear to be a new skill leading organizations started demanding in 2018, suggesting future value (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Demand for Payroll and Timekeeping Clerks

### Demand for Payroll and Timekeeping Clerks

- • Increasing in demand for HR leaders *and*  
■ • No demand, stagnant or decreasing in demand for all other organizations
- • Increasing, decreasing or stagnant in demand for both HR leaders and all other organizations *or*  
■ • Decreasing in demand for HR leaders, but no demand for all other organizations
- • Decreasing in demand for HR leaders *and*  
■ • Stagnant or increasing in demand for all other organizations

Skill	Change (HR Leaders)	Change (Others)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (HR Leaders)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (Others)
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Business Insights	N/A	N/A	4%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Software as a Service (SaaS)	400%	16%	6%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Microsoft Office	73%	338%	24%	15%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> General Ledger Software	150%	30%	6%	5%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Bilingual (Spanish)	133%	16%	9%	1%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Salesforce CRM	50%	121%	4%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Customer Relationship Management (CRM)	N/A	64%	4%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Microsoft SharePoint	N/A	63%	4%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Transaction Processing	67%	35%	6%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Positive Pay	N/A	27%	6%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Multi-State Payroll	N/A	25%	5%	6%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Call Management Systems	-12%	N/A	9%	0%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> Time and Attendance	-24%	19%	24%	9%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> Legal Compliance	-33%	2%	8%	0%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> Payroll Tax	-13%	22%	9%	6%

Source: Gartner TalentNeuron

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## Compensation and Benefits Managers

The compensation and benefits manager role includes job titles such as total rewards system manager, director of payroll process and global payroll manager.

Leading HR organizations just began demanding customer success, process reengineering, database reporting, application development and business-consulting skills in 2018 (see Figure 9). Other organizations should consider if and how these skills might be valuable to compensation and benefits managers at their own organizations in the future.

Figure 9: Demand for Compensation and Benefits Managers

### Demand for Compensation and Benefits Managers

- • Increasing in demand for HR leaders *and*  
 • No demand, stagnant or decreasing in demand for all other organizations
- • Increasing, decreasing or stagnant in demand for both HR leaders and all other organizations *or*  
 • Decreasing in demand for HR leaders, but no demand for all other organizations
- • Decreasing in demand for HR leaders *and*  
 • Stagnant or increasing in demand for all other organizations

Skill	Change (HR Leaders)	Change (Others)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (HR Leaders)	Percentage of Job Postings Requiring Skill (Others)
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Customer Success	N/A	N/A	4%	0%
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Process Reengineering	N/A	N/A	3%	0%
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Database Reporting	N/A	N/A	2%	0%
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Application Development	N/A	N/A	2%	0%
<span style="color: green;">■</span> Business Consulting	0%	N/A	1%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Microsoft Office	700%	154%	12%	10%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Data Warehousing	N/A	137%	4%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Behavioral Health	N/A	92%	1%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> HR Management System (HRMS)	N/A	35%	3%	1%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Acquisition Integration	N/A	22%	12%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> HR Information System (HRIS)	20%	41%	9%	12%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Time and Attendance	N/A	13%	4%	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> Compliance Testing	N/A	10%	1%	1%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> Corporate Governance	-57%	21%	2%	0%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> Corporate Finance	0%	47%	1%	0%

Source: Gartner TalentNeuron

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## Conclusion

A continually evolving workforce requires HR functions to upskill their own employees to prepare for the future. Talking to business leaders about their projections isn't enough to stay ahead; instead, organizations should supplement these conversations by reviewing unbiased market trends to help identify emerging skills for different HR roles.

Fortunately, leading HR organizations are well-versed in developing top HR talent, so other organizations can use leading organizations' expertise to inform their own development strategies. By looking at how skills needs for the most in-demand HR roles have changed over time, organizations can cultivate a market-informed perspective to inform their investment in specific skills.

By investigating in the emerging skills highlighted in this report, HR leaders can proactively create recruitment and development strategies that take their organizations into the future.

## Recommended by the Authors

- [TalentNeuron™](#)

Gartner TalentNeuron™ combines big data and statistical insights to provide global talent, location and competitive intelligence for any industry or function.

## About This Research

Our platform gathers HR talent data from over 65,000 global sources and continuously retests it for quality, accuracy and consistency. Using this platform, we scraped job descriptions that aligned with each of the eight most in-demand roles posted between January 2018 and December 2018 for skills demand. We then segmented the data by HR leaders (American Express, BP, Cargill, Cisco, Delhaize, General Electric, General Mills, Hebert Smith Freehills, IBM, Intel, National Grid, PayPal, Philips, Shell and Unilever) and all other companies. We pulled data from the platform in May 2019.

## Endnote

[1] Some change percentages (e.g., 5,700% increase in demand for information security skills) appear particularly large due to relatively small sample sizes.