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Global Trends in Onboarding and their impact on talent retention: a systematic review

Tendencias globales del onboarding y su impacto en la retención del talento: revisión sistemática

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Abstract

Onboarding has established itself as a key strategy in human talent management due to its influence on workplace adaptation, organizational socialization, and employee retention. The objective of this study was to analyze global trends in onboarding and its impact on talent retention based on scientific evidence published between 2021 and 2025. The research was conducted through a systematic literature review following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. The search was performed in Scopus, Web of Science, Redalyc, and SciELO using terms related to onboarding, organizational socialization, talent retention, and human resource management. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 32 studies were selected for the final analysis. The results identified nine predominant thematic categories, with talent retention (22 studies), organizational adaptation and socialization (18 studies), and organizational commitment (15 studies) standing out. Likewise, the main trends identified were the formalization of onboarding (17 studies), talent retention as a strategic outcome (15 studies), and the digitization and incorporation of artificial intelligence into onboarding processes (12 studies). It is concluded that onboarding has evolved from an operational induction practice into a strategic tool capable of strengthening employee retention, engagement, and integration, thereby contributing to the sustainability and competitiveness of organizations in increasingly dynamic and digitized work environments.

Keywords: onboarding, talent retention, organizational socialization, engagement, human resources management.

Resumen

El onboarding se ha consolidado como una estrategia relevante en la gestión del talento humano debido a su influencia en la adaptación laboral, la socialización organizacional y la retención del personal. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar las tendencias globales del onboarding y su impacto en la retención del talento

a partir de la evidencia científica publicada entre 2021 y 2025. La investigación se desarrolló mediante una revisión sistemática de literatura siguiendo las directrices PRISMA 2020. La búsqueda se realizó en Scopus, Web of Science, Redalyc y SciELO utilizando términos relacionados con onboarding, socialización organizacional, retención del talento y gestión de recursos humanos. Tras aplicar los criterios de inclusión y exclusión, se seleccionaron 32 estudios para el análisis final. Los resultados permitieron identificar nueve categorías temáticas predominantes, destacando la retención del talento (22 estudios), la adaptación organizacional y socialización (18 estudios) y el compromiso organizacional (15 estudios). Asimismo, las principales tendencias identificadas fueron la formalización del onboarding (17 estudios), la retención del talento como resultado estratégico (15 estudios) y la digitalización e incorporación de inteligencia artificial en los procesos de integración (12 estudios). Se concluye que el onboarding ha evolucionado desde una práctica operativa de inducción hacia una herramienta estratégica capaz de fortalecer la permanencia, el compromiso y la integración de los colaboradores, contribuyendo a la sostenibilidad y competitividad de las organizaciones en entornos laborales cada vez más dinámicos y digitalizados.

Palabras clave: onboarding, retención de talento, socialización organizacional, compromiso, gestión humana.

Introduction

In recent years, onboarding has transitioned from an operational welcome procedure into a strategic human talent management tool. Its proper implementation directly influences adaptation, commitment, and, most notably, talent retention, a matter of particular relevance in a global context shaped by digitalization, labor mobility, and shifting work models (Herrera Márquez, 2026; Sierra Rizo et al., 2026).

Understood as a structured process of incorporation and organizational socialization, onboarding has the potential to reduce workplace uncertainty, facilitate cultural integration, and strengthen the socio-emotional bonds between new employees and their organizations. In sectors such as technology, healthcare, education, and services, where turnover rates are high and learning curves are steep, effective onboarding has positioned itself as a critical practice for organizational sustainability (Ruiz Romero, 2024; Sánchez & Hugo, 2025).

The rapid expansion of hybrid and remote work arrangements has introduced new challenges to integration processes. Organizations now face the need to ensure effective onboarding experiences in environments characterized by reduced in-person interaction, heightened technological demands, and evolving worker expectations. Consequently, onboarding is no longer confined to the first few days on the job (Navarro & García, 2026; Sierra Rizo et al., 2026) but has instead become an ongoing process aimed at facilitating integration, reinforcing organizational identity, and promoting sustainable employment relationships over time.

Internationally, studies conducted in North America, Europe, and Asia demonstrate that onboarding positively impacts employee retention, productivity, and the development of a robust organizational culture. In Latin America, however, implementation continues to face challenges such as process informality, a shortage of specialized personnel, and limited use of technology in induction systems (Huertas & Pineda, 2025; Ruiz Romero, 2024).

Despite growing academic and business interest in onboarding, the recent literature reveals considerable diversity in conceptual, methodological, and contextual approaches (Herrera Márquez, 2026; León Manzo, 2025). While some studies focus on assessing its influence on adaptation and organizational commitment, others examine its relationship with productivity, employee experience, or the digital transformation of human resources processes.

Although scientific production on onboarding has grown steadily in recent years, much of the available evidence remains fragmented across sectors, geographic regions, and methodological approaches, making it difficult to construct an integrative view of its organizational effects. This fragmentation limits the identification of transferable practices across different work contexts and reduces

the potential for using accumulated knowledge as a foundation for strategic decision-making in human talent management. It is therefore relevant to examine jointly the evidence generated between 2021 and 2025, a period marked by profound transformations in work dynamics, the consolidation of hybrid models, and increased organizational digitalization, factors that have redefined how organizations incorporate, integrate, and retain their employees. Research also highlights that integration processes directly influence employee motivation, while Navarro and García (2026) emphasize the emerging role of artificial intelligence in the evolution of these practices.

Given this scenario, systematizing the available scientific evidence to understand how onboarding has evolved in recent years and identify the main trends guiding its implementation internationally is both timely and pertinent. This review therefore seeks to answer the following research question: What are the predominant global trends in onboarding practices, and how do these practices contribute to talent retention in contemporary organizations?

Within this framework, the present article aims to analyze global onboarding trends through a review of scientific literature published between 2021 and 2025, with particular emphasis on their impact on talent retention. Through a rigorous selection of empirical and theoretical studies from different regions of the world, the study seeks to identify patterns, approaches, benefits, and common challenges, as well as to propose lines of action that contribute to optimizing this practice across diverse organizational contexts.

Methodology

This research was developed as a systematic literature review, following the guidelines established by PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). The analysis was conducted through a comparative thematic synthesis aimed at classifying the selected studies, identifying common patterns, and determining the main trends related to onboarding and its impact on talent retention.

In the identification phase, a comprehensive search was carried out in the Scopus, Web of Science, Redalyc, and SciELO databases. The search strategy was constructed using Boolean operators that combined the main concepts associated with the phenomenon under study. The equation used was: *(“onboarding” OR “employee onboarding” OR “employee integration” OR “organizational socialization”) AND (“employee retention” OR “talent retention”) AND (“talent management” OR “human resource management”).* Inclusion criteria comprised empirical studies, literature reviews, and theoretical analyses published between 2021 and 2025, in English or Spanish, available in full text, and directly related to personnel integration processes, organizational socialization, or talent retention in work settings.

During the selection phase, duplicate records and those not meeting the established criteria were removed. Retrieved records were organized and deduplicated using Zotero, a tool employed for preliminary detection of duplicate entries. Subsequently, titles, abstracts, and keywords were reviewed to determine thematic relevance, reducing the initial sample from 44 to 40 potentially eligible studies. Although the search equation incorporated terms associated with talent management and employee retention, some databases retrieved records related to educational, technological, or service contexts that used similar terminology. These studies were identified during the screening process and excluded for not corresponding to the work setting defined in the inclusion criteria.

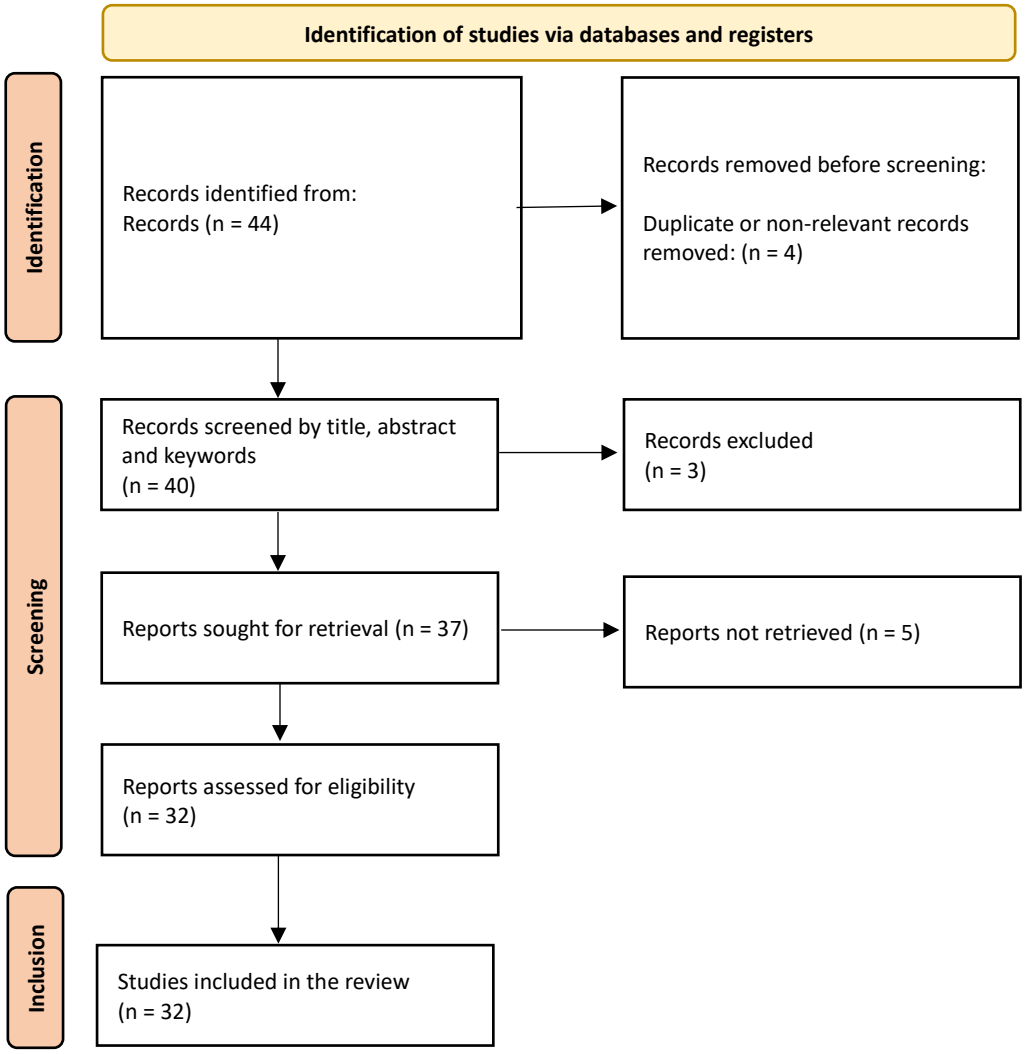
Title, abstract, and full-text evaluation was conducted independently by the participating researchers. Discrepancies were discussed in consensus meetings until agreement was reached on the inclusion or exclusion of each study. The final selection was made considering the criteria previously established in the review protocol. Although a formal inter-rater agreement coefficient was not calculated, the independent review and consensus process helped strengthen the consistency of inclusion and exclusion decisions.

In the eligibility phase, full-text reading of the selected documents was performed. Studies lacking full-text access, focusing exclusively on technical induction processes, published before 2021, or addressing onboarding from the perspective of external clients or users were excluded. As a result, eight studies were excluded, yielding a final sample of 32 scientific articles.

Finally, in the inclusion phase, the 32 studies were classified according to their methodological approach, geographic region, type of organization, and variables analyzed. The information was systematized using an analysis matrix that allowed for the identification of trends, benefits, challenges, and predominant approaches related to onboarding and talent retention.

In addition to the 32 studies included in the final sample, some complementary sources were used for the theoretical contextualization of the research and the construction of the introduction. These references did not form part of the analysis matrix or the sample selected through the PRISMA process. The procedure for identifying, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies is presented synthetically in Figure 1 through the corresponding PRISMA flow diagram.

Figure 1. *PRISMA flow diagram*



Note: Authors' own elaboration.

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Results and discussion

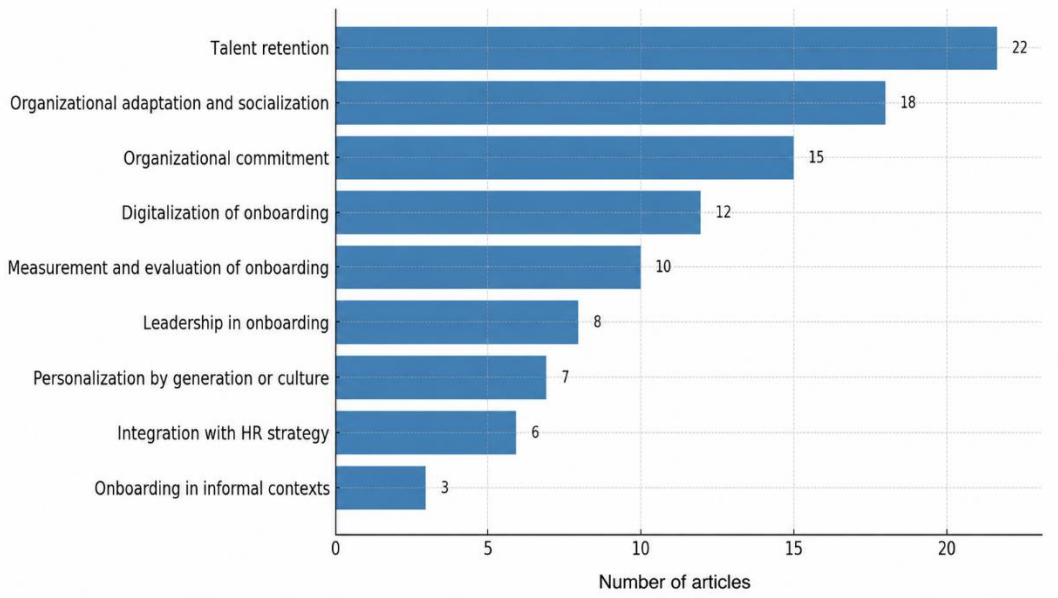
As indicated in the methodological section, results are presented in two dimensions. First, a bar graph displays the grouped themes and the number of studies addressing each. Second, an Annex summarizes the main contributions or proposals identified in the literature review.

The Annexes present the main methodological characteristics of the 32 selected studies. A predominance of empirical research and literature reviews developed across various organizational contexts was observed. The reported findings reveal growing interest in analyzing onboarding as a strategy associated with workplace adaptation, organizational commitment, and talent retention, as well as exploring the impact of digital transformation on personnel integration processes.

Thematic categories on onboarding

The 32 selected articles were analyzed according to their research topics, which were grouped into **nine thematic categories**. This categorization allows for the identification of the main lines of academic interest regarding onboarding and its relationship with talent retention. Figure 2 shows the frequency with which each category appears in the reviewed studies:

Figure 2. *Frequency of thematic categories identified in onboarding studies (2021–2025)*



Note: Frequency with which each thematic category appears in the reviewed studies is shown.

The presentation of results was organized around the thematic categories identified in the review of the 32 analyzed articles, beginning with those of greatest relevance and moving toward the least recurrent. It should be noted that the criterion used is frequency of appearance rather than theoretical or practical relevance. The objective is not to rank the topics but to facilitate a comprehensive and orderly reading that allows for visualization of the most prominent research trends regarding onboarding and its link to organizational development.

Figure 2 shows that the "talent retention" category groups articles exploring how onboarding influences the reduction of labor turnover and the permanence of talent within organizations. Several of these studies highlight that a structured integration process has a direct impact on employees' intention to stay (Craft, 2021; Guaman Guevara et al., 2023; Walker-Schmidt et al., 2022). Additionally, it is noted that

the absence of adequate induction processes generates early disconnection between workers and organizational culture (Henríquez Spencer, 2023; Patel & Mohanty, 2024).

In the "organizational adaptation and socialization" category, the articles analyzed examine the role of onboarding in the cultural and operational integration of new employees. They emphasize that organizational socialization not only reduces uncertainty but also improves emotional attachment to the company (Frögéli et al., 2023; Narayansany & Mat Isa, 2021). Early mentoring, informal training, and accompaniment practices are also highlighted as key socialization tools.

Studies exploring the "organizational commitment" category analyze this variable as a mediator between the entry process and performance or retention outcomes (Chenji & Raghavendra, 2021; Jankowski, 2025). Others show that a sense of belonging is strengthened when the welcome process is meaningful and personalized (Jeske & Olson, 2021).

In the "digitization of onboarding" category, research describing the use of digital platforms, virtual reality tools, artificial intelligence, or hybrid environments to automate or enhance the integration process was identified. For instance, Godinho et al. (2023) and Pinco et al. (2024) analyzed the impact of digital onboarding in Europe, while Thokal and Patil (2024) examined its effectiveness in technology sectors in India.

Articles grouped under the "onboarding measurement and evaluation" category present models or instruments for assessing the quality and outcomes of onboarding. Some validate scales to measure satisfaction, retention, or adaptation (Farakish et al., 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2022), while others propose indicators for monitoring the process from a human resources perspective (Aamer & Milani, 2023; Weilage, 2025).

The sixth category, "role of leadership," addresses the role that direct leaders or supervisors play in the onboarding experience. Smith et al. (2021) and Narayansany and Mat Isa (2021) highlighted that close and empathetic leadership during the first days has a significant effect on initial satisfaction and adaptation.

Likewise, in the "process personalization" category, some studies suggest adapting onboarding according to generation (millennials, centennials) or specific organizational culture. Walker-Schmidt et al. (2022) propose differentiated processes for young professionals with high mobility.

Similarly, in the "integration with human resources strategy" category, studies that conceptualize onboarding as part of a broader talent management strategy, alongside training, evaluation, and development, are located. Craft (2021) and Patel and Mohanty (2024) suggested that integration should form part of the employee life cycle with a systemic vision.

Finally, in the "onboarding in informal or emerging contexts" category, some studies conducted in Latin America and Africa evidenced important limitations such as process informality, low investment, and lack of indicators (Guaman Guevara et al., 2023; Henríquez Spencer, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2022). These studies proposed guidelines for formalizing practices that often occur intuitively or empirically.

In conclusion, the most frequent categories were: 1) talent retention, present in twenty-two articles, 2) organizational adaptation and socialization in eighteen articles, and 3) organizational commitment in fifteen articles.

The least addressed categories were integration with human resources strategy with six articles and onboarding in informal or emerging contexts with three articles.

Identified proposals and contributions

A total of nine contributions or technical and empirical proposals were identified and categorized across the reviewed articles. These were classified by frequency of appearance, that is, how many studies coincide in pointing out the same contribution.

The Annex shows a diversity of theoretical and empirical contributions identified in the analyzed articles. Some were mentioned in one or two studies, while others achieved a notable presence in more than a dozen works.

The most frequent categories reflect a shared concern for the need to formalize the onboarding process, moving beyond improvised or fragmented approaches. This line is consistent with evidence linking it directly to talent retention, a category that also registers high presence. Both suggest that onboarding should not be understood as an administrative formality but as a critical strategy for organizational integration.

Another group of articles highlights the role of technology as a key ally in integration processes, with special emphasis on digital platforms, task automation, and solutions adapted to remote or hybrid work. This reveals a growing trend in organizations seeking to scale or personalize their induction processes in globalized contexts.

Equally noteworthy is the attention paid to organizational commitment as a desired outcome of onboarding. This perspective positions the process not merely as an initial adaptation tool but as a mechanism that enhances emotional loyalty and alignment with organizational values from the very first contact. Other less frequent but no less relevant contributions include the role of leadership during entry, personalization of the process according to generational or cultural characteristics, and the need to integrate onboarding into the overall human talent management strategy. These elements reflect a paradigm shift toward more human, contextual, and strategic processes.

Finally, some emerging categories reflect particular difficulties in Latin American or African contexts, such as informality, low investment in human resources, and lack of evaluation tools. These findings make regional gaps visible while also offering starting points for designing proposals adapted to these environments.

Taken together, the systematized contributions contribute both to the construction of a theoretical framework on onboarding and to the identification of gaps and priority areas for intervention, especially regarding its institutionalization, measurement, and connection with organizational strategy.

Table 1. *Main trends and contributions identified in the analyzed studies*

Identified trend	Frequency of appearance
Onboarding formalization	17
Talent retention	15
Digitization and AI	12
Organizational commitment	10
Onboarding evaluation	9
Leadership and mentoring	8
Personalization	7
Human management	6
Remote and hybrid onboarding	5

Note: Authors' own elaboration. A single study could contribute to more than one thematic category; therefore, the sum of frequencies exceeds the total of 32 analyzed studies.

Overall, the analyzed studies show that onboarding has evolved from a practice centered exclusively on initial induction toward a comprehensive human talent management strategy. The reviewed literature reveals a growing concern for structuring more systematic integration processes, aligned with

organizational objectives, and oriented toward strengthening adaptation, commitment, and employee permanence. Likewise, a progressive expansion of approaches incorporating digital tools, hybrid integration modalities, and continuous mentoring mechanisms is observed, reflecting the need to respond to increasingly dynamic and technologically interconnected work environments.

Overall, the findings allow us to affirm that onboarding constitutes a strategic factor for promoting talent retention and consolidating positive work experiences from the initial stages of employment. The identified trends reveal that organizations achieve better results when they integrate personnel integration with human development policies, leadership, organizational socialization, and digital transformation. Consequently, the available evidence suggests that designing flexible, structured, and employee-adapted onboarding programs represents a relevant condition for strengthening organizational sustainability and addressing the contemporary challenges of talent management.

Among the limitations of this review is the selection of studies published only between 2021 and 2025, as well as the inclusion of research available in English and Spanish. Furthermore, although databases of recognized academic prestige were consulted, some relevant studies indexed in other sources may not have been incorporated. Nevertheless, the selection criteria applied allowed for obtaining a representative sample of recent scientific production on onboarding and talent retention.

Based on the identified findings, an evolutionary onboarding maturity model composed of three progressive levels is proposed. In a first stage, organizations develop informal processes characterized by basic induction and initial employee adaptation activities. In a second stage, onboarding is formalized through structured protocols, mentoring programs, organizational socialization, and systematic performance monitoring. Finally, in a third stage, processes incorporate digital tools, data analytics, and artificial intelligence to personalize the integration experience, anticipate disengagement risks, and strengthen talent retention. This integrative model suggests that the transition from traditional schemes to intelligent onboarding systems requires not only technological investment but also an organizational culture oriented toward learning, innovation, and strategic human talent management. In the Latin American context, this evolution could significantly contribute to improving workplace adaptation, organizational commitment, and employee permanence in increasingly dynamic and digitized environments.

Conclusions

Throughout this research, a series of characteristics, approaches, and trends that shape the current global onboarding landscape have been identified. Based on the analysis of 32 scientific articles, it became evident that this practice has evolved from an operational approach toward a strategic tool with potential impact on talent retention, organizational commitment, and comprehensive organizational development.

One of the most relevant aspects found in the literature is the need to institutionalize and formalize onboarding processes, especially in contexts where informality or improvisation predominates. This deficiency not only affects new employee adaptation but also weakens the connection with organizational culture and reduces the likelihood of long-term permanence. Likewise, a significant gap in process evaluation was detected, which limits continuous improvement and articulation with other strategic areas of human talent management.

Another point worth highlighting is that many studies concur in pointing out onboarding as a practice still addressed reactively, focused on resolving new personnel entry without necessarily integrating it with formative or organizational development objectives. This limited vision prevents capitalization of its true potential, which extends beyond informational induction toward the construction of meaning, belonging, and commitment from the employee's first contact with the organization.

Along these lines, the results also highlight the growing use of digital technologies as support for onboarding, opening new scenarios for scalability, personalization, and monitoring. However, challenges related to lack of connectivity, resources, or digital competencies in certain regions still exist, demanding proposals adapted to local realities.

Finally, the need to continue researching onboarding from diverse perspectives and with comparative approaches across regions, sectors, and organizational levels is raised. Some future lines could focus on: 1) analyzing how onboarding is integrated into organizational development strategy; 2) exploring its role as a mediator of organizational commitment across different cultural contexts; 3) identifying good practices in the use of technological tools for remote or hybrid integration; and 4) proposing evaluation models that allow measuring the impact of onboarding systemically.

Assuming onboarding as a key process rather than an isolated stage will allow organizations to move toward more human, strategic, and sustainable talent management.

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