

HR × HIGHER EDUCATION WORKING SESSION

HR's Role in AI-Driven Layoffs and Reskilling Trade-Offs

*Symbiotic strategies for retraining affected employees
and building the AI-ready workforce employers need*

Julienne Shields | Director - Center for Entrepreneurship | Millikin University

Session Roadmap

Symbiotic Opportunities

4 Pillars of Readiness

The Hard Reckoning: Retrain vs. Replace

*Role-based decision
framework*

Humane Transition Packages & the Feedback Loop

*Emerging credit and
non-credit pathways*

Why This Conversation Can't Wait

59 of every 100 workers will need reskilling by 2030

The World Economic Forum projects nearly 60% of the global workforce will need meaningful upskilling or reskilling within five years — and roughly 1 in 9 of them are unlikely to receive it.

AI is changing work far more often than it's eliminating it

SHRM research (2026) AI is reshaping how work gets done more often than it's replacing workers outright

Employers are asking HR for a plan, not a policy memo

Executives want a defensible, repeatable way to decide where to invest in people versus where to automate.

Universities have the infrastructure sitting idle after 5pm

Credit-bearing courses, faculty expertise, and career coaching capacity already exist but they're rarely aimed at incumbent workers.

Two Institutions, One Shared Outcome

THE EMPLOYER NEEDS

- Retractable, AI-fluent workforce without a full rehire cycle
- Defensible, humane story for the roles that must change
- Pipeline of certified, job-ready talent for new AI-enabled roles

THE AI- TRANSITION PARTNERSHIP

THE UNIVERSITY NEEDS

- Enrollment pathways beyond traditional 18-year-olds
- Employer relationships that turn into scholarships, internships, and gifts
- Proof that credit-bearing programs solve real workforce problems

Four Pillars of an AI-Ready Workforce

01

AI Literacy

Shared vocabulary, working alongside AI tools, creating potential, understanding pitfall, and verifying output.

02

Data Skills

Comfort reading, structuring, and questioning data

03

Certifications

Portable credentials (credit and non-credit bearing) with visibility and defensibility in a promotion case.

04

Digital Adaptability

The habit of learning new tools quickly, the meta-skill that outlasts any single platform or model.

Four Pillars of an AI-Ready Workforce

01



AI Literacy

Shared vocabulary, working alongside AI tools, creating potential, understanding pitfall, and verifying output.

02



Data Skills

Comfort reading, structuring, and questioning data

03



Certifications

Portable credentials (credit and non-credit bearing) with visibility and defensibility in a promotion case.

04



Digital Adaptability

The habit of learning new tools quickly, the meta-skill that outlasts any single platform or model.

LET'S TALK · 3 MINUTES

Where's the Heat in Your Organization?

TURN TO A PARTNER AND DISCUSS:

- Where do you already see AI reshaping how a role gets done — even quietly?
- Is your organization currently treating that as a retraining question or a headcount question?

Retrain vs. Replace Isn't an Emotional Question

HR leaders are being asked to answer without a framework.

The Retrain Case

- Institutional knowledge and relationships are hard to replace
- Replacing an employee costs 50–200% of salary — retraining is often cheaper (SHRM, 2025)
- Signals to workforce that change won't cost them their job

The Replace Case

- The task itself, not just the skill, may be disappearing
- New roles may need capabilities no amount of retraining builds quickly
- Delay can cost competitive position while the role is protected

The Retrain vs. Replace Scorecard

Five questions HR can score with a manager before a role decision reaches the executive table.

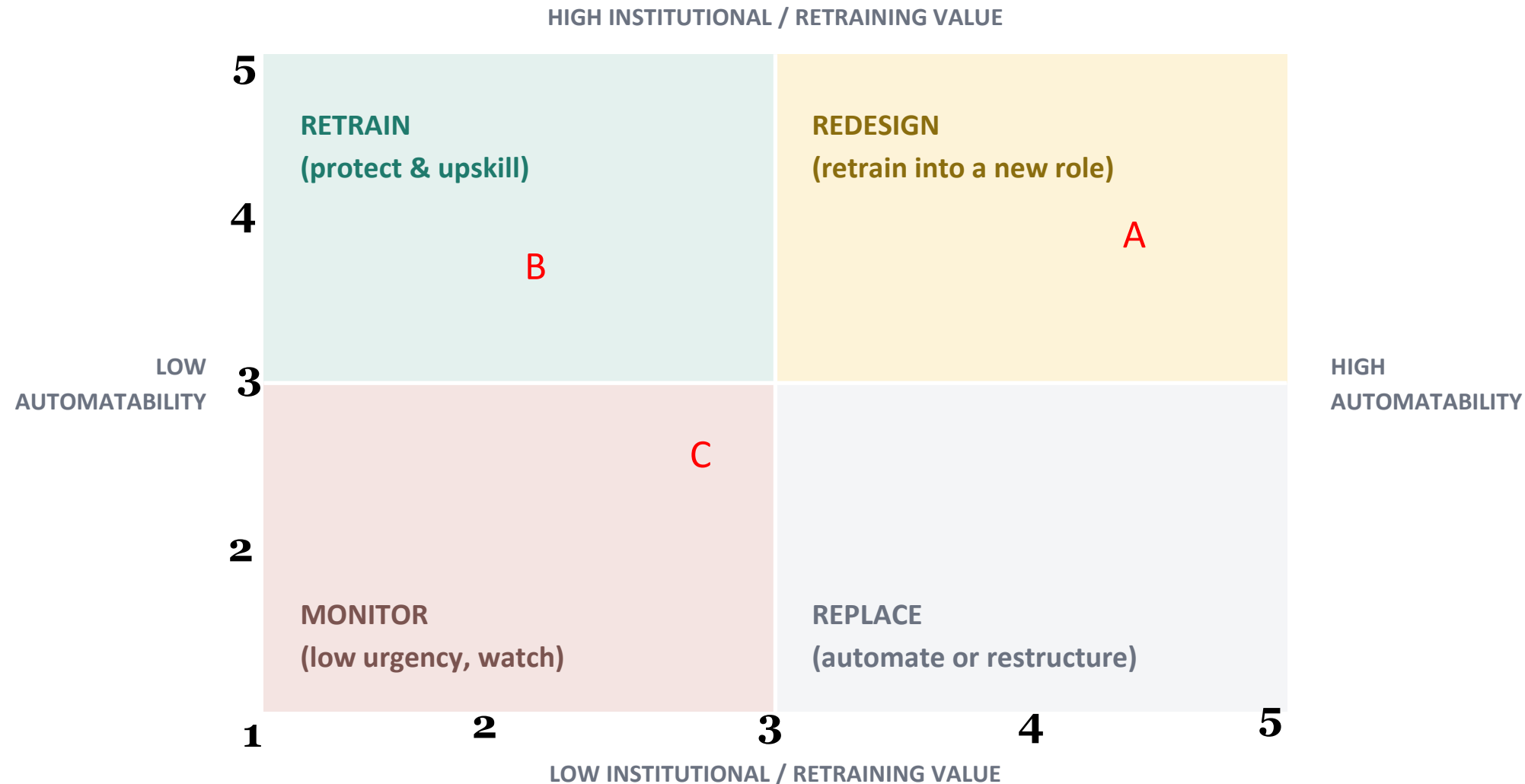
X-AXIS • AUTOMATABILITY (Q1 + Q2 averaged)

1	Task Automatability	How much of the role's core work can AI tools already do reliably today?
2	Cost Delta	Retraining + coaching cost vs. recruit, hire, and ramp cost for a new role?

Y-AXIS • INSTITUTIONAL & RETRAINING VALUE (Q3 + Q4 + Q5 averaged)

3	Retraining Feasibility	Can the needed new skills realistically be built in 3–9 months?
4	Institutional Value	How costly is it to lose this person's relationships, context, or tenure?
5	Employee Signal	Has this person shown adaptability — curiosity, tool adoption, initiative?

Plotting a Decision



X-axis = average(Q1, Q2) · Y-axis = average(Q3, Q4, Q5)

Worked example: Scenario A scores X = 3.0, Y = 3.0 — a genuine boundary case (full calculation in the facilitator guide).

SMALL GROUPS • 15 MINUTES

Bring the Framework to the Table

SCENARIO A

A 12-year accounts-payable clerk whose invoice-matching work is now 70% handled by an AI tool. Strong institutional relationships; has never used a new software tool without heavy support.

SCENARIO B

A customer-service rep whose ticket volume dropped 40% after a chatbot launch. Early, enthusiastic adopter of the new AI tools; frequently suggests process fixes to her manager.

In your group: score both scenarios on the 5-question scorecard, plot each on the matrix, and agree on a one-sentence recommendation you'd defend to an executive.

What Makes a Transition Package Humane

01

Credit or Non-Credit Coursework

Academic credit where it fits. Non-credit certs and badges move faster and reach employees a credit program can't.

02

Dedicated Career Coaching

A named coach who helps the employee see a next role, not just a next class.

03

Protected Time & Pacing

Paid time to learn, and a realistic runway (not a night-and-weekend mandate on top of a full workload).

04

A Named Landing Role

The pathway points somewhere specific, not 'reskilling' in the abstract, but a defined next position.

Credit-Bearing Isn't the Only Lever

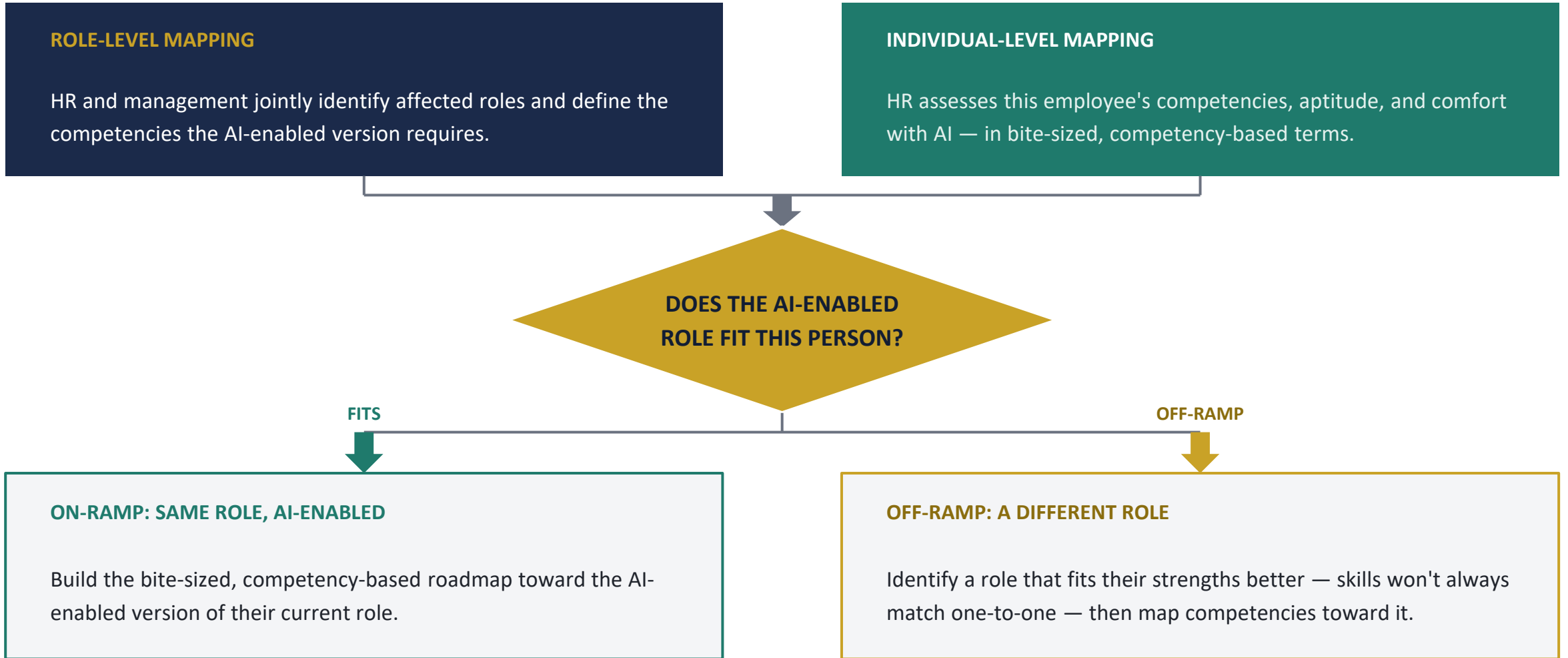
NON-CREDIT + CREDIT, NOT EITHER/OR

- Non-credit badges move at the speed AI tools actually change (weeks, not semesters)
- Lower barrier for a reluctant learner: no transcript, no admissions process, no prerequisite math
- Credit still matters for a durable career pivot or a wage-grade change
- Strongest packages stack both: a non-credit credential now, a credit on-ramp later

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PARTNER(S)

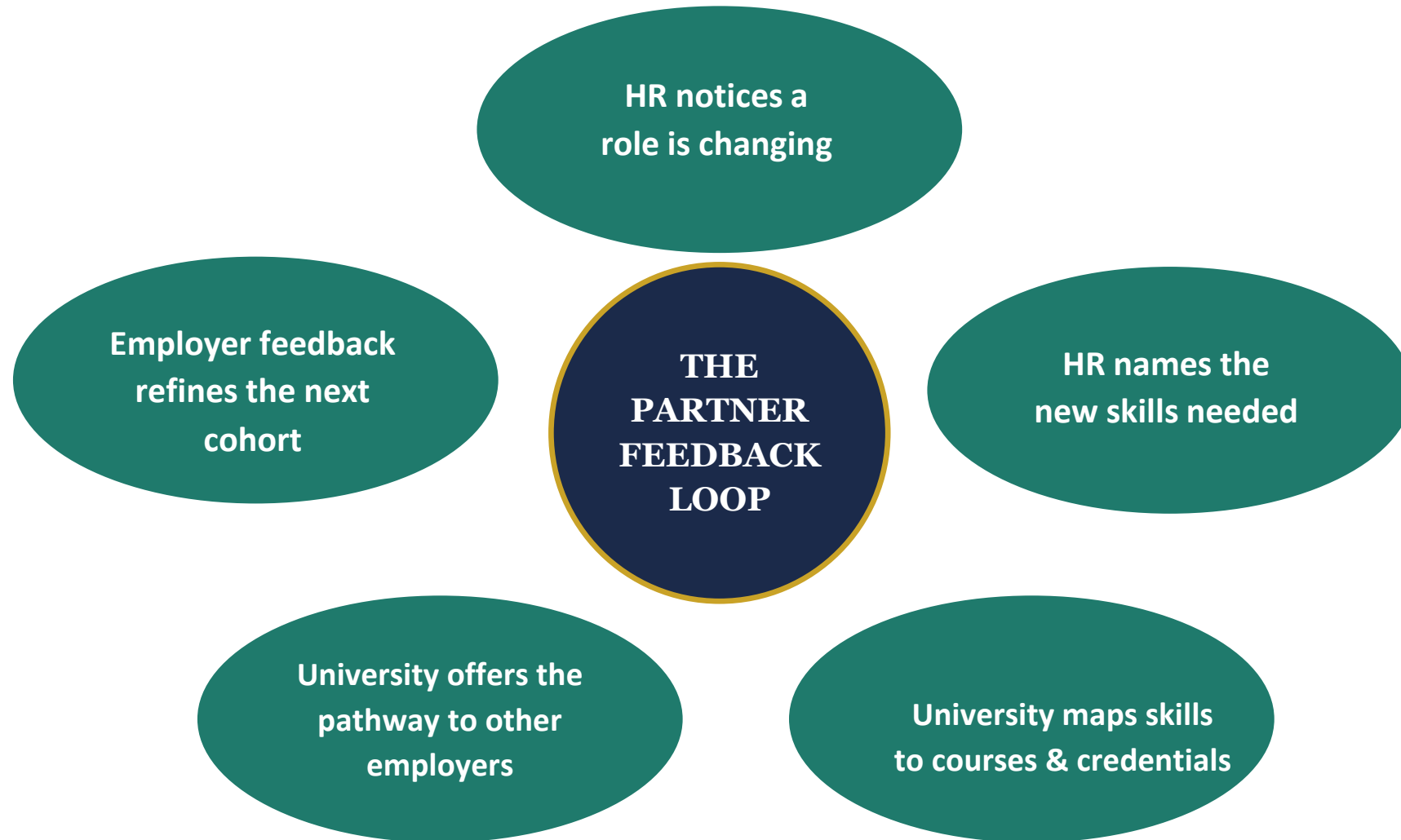
- Community colleges: fast, skills-based, often wired into local employer training
- But narrower fit for roles needing applied research capacity or deep AI/data faculty expertise
- Four-year institutions are a far more viable partner than before — pairing credit and non-credit with research-level depth

Mapping the Path Isn't a Straight Line



Both paths feed the same feedback loop below — nothing here is locked in on day one.

Translating Role Change Into Learning Pathways



One Role, Translated

TODAY

Customer-Service Representative

Answers tickets manually; measured on volume and resolution time.



TOMORROW

AI-Enabled Customer-Experience Specialist

Oversees AI-handled tickets, resolves escalations, and improves the AI's responses over time.

THE LEARNING PATHWAY: AI-tool fluency certificate → data-quality micro-credential → University CX course

INDIVIDUALLY OR IN PAIRS • 8 MINUTES

Translate a Role From Your Own Organization

FILL IN THE TEMPLATE:

Today's role: _____

What AI now handles: _____

New role name: _____

Two skills the pathway must teach: _____

Facilitator: invite 2–3 volunteers to read their translation aloud before closing.

CLOSING

Build Partnerships Together

- Bring one role from your organization to the scorecard this month
- Identify the university partner who can map that role's learning pathway
- Name a career coach or point person for the pilot cohort

Sources & Further Reading

Cited directly on the slides marked with a footnote:

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM	Future of Jobs Report 2025 59 of every 100 workers will need reskilling by 2030 (slide 3).	weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025
SHRM	Statement to Congress on an AI-Ready Workforce, 2026 AI is changing work more often than replacing it (slide 3).	shrm.org/mena/advocacy
SHRM	"The Myth of Replaceability," 2025 Replacing an employee costs 50–200% of salary (slide 7).	shrm.org/executive-network/insights
BROOKINGS	"The Credential Boom Is Here," 2026 1.5M+ non-degree credentials nationwide (slide 12).	brookings.edu/articles/credential-boom-which-ones-help-workers
COURSERA	2025 Micro-Credentials Impact Report 90% of employers pay more for micro-credentials (slide 12).	coursera.org/enterprise/resources/ebooks

For further reading:

- SHRM, "AI in the Workplace" Research (2024) — shrm.org/topics-tools/research
- SHRM, "Training Is Dead. Long Live Real-Time Upskilling." (2025) — shrm.org/topics-tools/news

The decision scorecard, four pillars, and feedback-loop model are original facilitator frameworks — not quotations from any single source.